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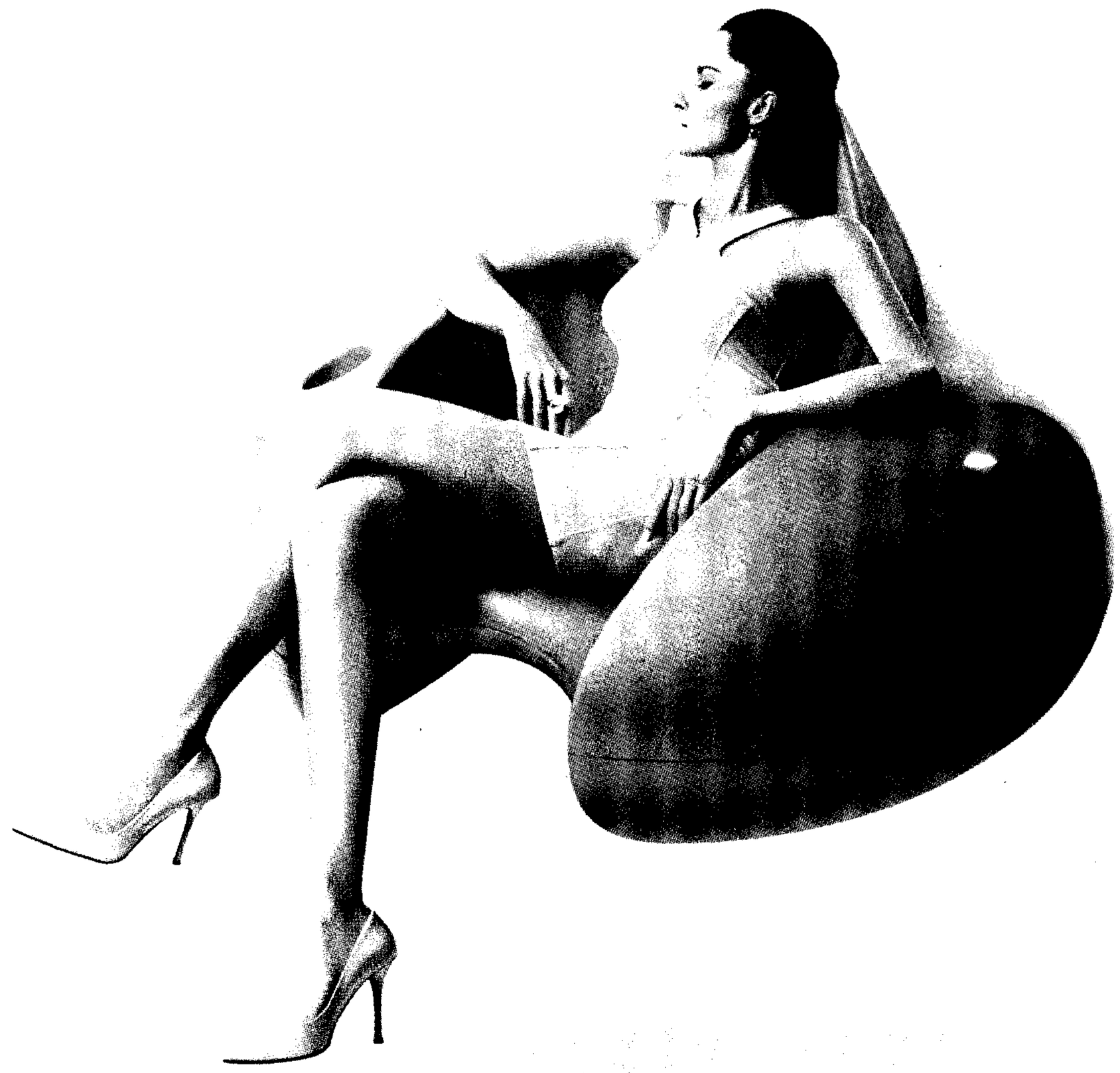

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IN A RECENT interview with the *Times* newspaper, I may have inadvertently mentioned that I personally murdered a business rival by pushing him over a cliff.

What was intended as a harmless joke on my part has now been blown up out of all proportion by jealous rivals in the media.

I have been reminded by my medical advisers that prior to the interview I had taken a heavy dose of the drug mendacidin, which is well-known for its dangerous side-effect, especially when combined with huge quantities of alcohol, of causing the patient to lie uncontrollably when giving interviews.

I hope this will be the end of this distressing incident. But should anyone be so foolish as to repeat the *canard* I shall have no alternative but to push them over a cliff.

E. Strobes
pp Lord Gnome
Westcliff-on-Sea
Nr Felixstowe.

"Sorry, sire, I think I've got a cnut allergy"

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PRIVATE EYE SUBSCRIPTIONS/SALES
PO Box 326, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8FA.
Subscription enquiries: 01795 414 871
Overseas: +44 (0) 1795 414 870 Fax: 01795 414 555.
Web: www.subsonline.co.uk
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SUBSCRIPTION RATES
£28 per annum. Europe and Eire £34. Airmail (rest of world) £38.
Cheques/POs to Private Eye. Mastercard/Visa.

ADVERTISING
Ten Alps Publishing, 9 Savoy Street, London WC2E 7HR.
Email: private-eye@tenalpspublishing.com
Display: 020 7878 2366 **Classified:** 020 7240 9129

Published by Pressdram Ltd, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. **Printed** by BGP Ltd, Bicester OX6 7QZ.
Distributed by P.E. Distributions, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. 020 7437 4017.

ABC

The torch bearer

■ **Writs crackers: Tesco sues the Grauniad** 7
■ **Mayor culpa: Ken v. Boris** 9
■ **New TV scandal: Piers Moron's back** 10
■ **Olympic shame: China's favourite fascist** 11
■ **MD: The politics of prostate cancer** 12
■ **Farmed Salman: the new Rushdie** 26

AS thousands take to the streets in the world's poorest countries to protest against food shortages, development specialists are putting the crisis down to rich countries' abandonment of agricultural investment in recent years. So serious is the situation that Gordon Brown has stepped in to demand action from the G8.

Yet nowhere has the flight from agriculture been swifter than at the British government's very own development fund CDC, which nine years ago had 32 percent of its investments in agriculture and now has, er, 5 percent – following a rush to commercialise the fund under New Labour with Gordon's full support. While the poor riot, however, the men who led the commercialisation continue to make millions from the business.

● *Actis does a Highland fling, p28*

IT HAS screwed scores of hospital budgets, snarled up the school building process and lumbered taxpayers with billions of pounds of hidden debts, yet the private finance initiative continues to thrive. Why?

Because there's a huge and hungry PFI industry out there that needs its billions and continues to control government thinking on PFI. The Treasury's little-noticed but crucial paper *Infrastructure procurement: delivering long term value* last month paved the way for yet more private finance – relying on "evidence" from, er, PFI consulatnts KPMG and PwC that PFI remains effective.

PwC's report in particular was a desperate attempt, called *Hanging in the balance*, to justify more PFI even though the off-balance sheet magic that so attracted Gordon Brown to it is due to end.

The report came out of the Treasury's private finance unit, run by Gordon McKechnie, a senior partner on secondment from Deloitte where, in the firm's words, he was "instrumental in building up the Deloitte PPP [PFI] and project finance capability". When McKechnie joined the Treasury last year, Deloitte's head of PFI Nick Prior (who himself used to run PFI at the MoD) expressed his delight at making "a positive contribution to the market". McKechnie has certainly done that with his latest report that will see more billions flood "the market".

EMBARRASSED by Severn Trent Water's £35m fine for lying to the regulator about its performance, chief executive Tony Wray blamed his predecessors. "There is no doubt," he said, "that the previous regime and culture in place during the era from 2000 to 2004 was overly bureaucratic and lacked sufficient controls and procedures."

It was during this previous regime that Severn Trent became one of the first corporations to get close to Labour, donating "£5,000 or more" to the party and hiring stands at its annual conference. Severn Trent's leaders soon became New Labour favourites. David Arculus, the company chairman until 2004, signed Labour's "business manifestos" and collected a knighthood.

Severn Trent may be embarrassed, but what about the government? The company's fine is so large because it tried to cheat the regulator; but guess who Labour appointed as chairman of its "Better Regulation Taskforce" in 2002? Step forward, Sir David Arculus.

Not that the Tories can make capital out of it. In February this year they proudly announced that Arculus would chair David Cameron's own commission on regulatory matters. Who better than the man under whose leadership Severn Trent was systematically falsifying leakage data, bad debt levels and customer performance scores to con the regulator into permitting price-hikes? When shadow business secretary Alan Duncan hailed Arculus as "someone who has enormous experience in this area", presumably this is what he meant.

WHEN Toby Kendall, the Oxford graduate employed by security intelligence firm C2i International, tried to infiltrate anti-aviation campaign Plane Stupid as "Ken Tobias", it wasn't the first time air protestors have been subjected to such tactics.

Last autumn moderators of a Google discussion group set up by AirportWatch were surprised to receive an email from an Italian called "Bella Regazza". She explained: "I live in Italy but am interested in the work going on in the UK to prevent expansion in aviation. This issue is not yet on the Italian political agenda but many green minded people are keen to learn from the UK. Please add me to your mailing list."

Strangely, the sender's hotmail address had the suffix "co.uk" – not normally used by Italian residents. Even stranger was the name following the word "From:" at the top of the email – Michelle Di Leo. The name was uncannily similar to that of Michelle Di Leo, director of FlyingMatters, the lobby group for aviation expansion whose members include BAA, British Airways, easyJet, Virgin Atlantic, Airbus and Boeing. This Michelle Di Leo "reports to" FlyingMatters' chairman, former Labour minister Brian Wilson.

PS: The *Guardian* asked FlyingMatters if it was involved in Toby Kendall's infiltration. "It's not the sort of thing we would do," replied Michelle Di Leo.

ACCORDING to the *Financial Times*, there has been "a collective scratching of heads" among economists at Gordon Brown's continued insistence that public pay restraint is vital to keep inflation low.

"The link between public-sector pay rises and inflation," it informed readers on 3 April, "is generally thought to be weak." The piece was headed: "The puzzle of PM's wage stand."

One solution to the puzzle may be that the PM believes what he reads in the *FT*. For, only a few pages later on the very same day, the paper noted that a pay-rise for public-sector workers in India "is troubling for several reasons" – one being that it is, er, "likely to fuel inflation".

"You can't mess with the Saudis – they've got all those weapons we sold them"

Street Of Shame

IN a column for the *Observer* about politicians' sex-lives, Edwina Currie writes that what the public dislike "is the contrast between what a politician says, or implies... and what he is actually doing when the lights are out."

She should know! In an *Observer* interview in 1989, Charlotte Rampling said that while preparing for the part of a fictional Tory in *Paris By Night* she studied real politicians such as Margaret Thatcher and Edwina Currie. Edwina promptly sued, claiming readers might infer that, like the Rampling character, she had an extra-marital lover. In fact, she insisted, she had been happily and faithfully married for 17 years. "It was outrageous," she told the high court jury. "It upset me very much. I have tried to make sure my home and my family are secure."

The *Observer* had to pay £5,000 damages plus tens of thousands in costs for casting aspersions, however invisible to the naked eye, on Edwina's monogamy. Only many years later did she reveal what she'd actually been doing while the lights were out: when she boasted on oath about her marital fidelity she had recently concluded a four-year affair with John Major – and had had another lover.

Having thus obtained £5,000 from the *Observer* by deception, presumably Edwina didn't have the nerve to demand a fee for her latest article.

THE news that Roger Alton is replacing Simon Kelner as editor of the *Independent* was the worst-kept secret in Fleet Street, though both men were denying it right up until the day before last week's announcement when Kelner was still telling the *Evening Standard*: "Don't believe everything you read."

Kelner was holding fire because he had lined up a big photo-spread and feel-good interview with *Campaign*, the magazine for the advertising industry. *Campaign* came up trumps, with editor Claire Beale making it the lead story. In a full-page feature inside, she heaped praise on both Kelner and Alton, describing the latter as "known for his outspoken, uncompromising, expletive-studded, thoroughly decent and self-deprecating style, and for being one of the most consistently successful editors in recent newspaper history".

Nowhere in this puff piece did Beale find space to mention that she also writes a weekly advertising column for, er, the *Independent*. But her generous tribute to Alton surely ought to mean the new editor will keep her column.

"Just imagine, shagging the bloke who shagged Kate Moss!"

SORRY seems to be the easiest word for Richard "Dirty" Desmond since his front-page apology to the parents of Madeleine McCann.

On 7 April the *Daily Star* apologised to Italian footballer Marco Materazzi, and agreed to pay substantial damages for alleging he made racist comments to Zinedine Zidane which provoked the famous headbutt in the World Cup Final. Five days before that, Dirty Des ordered the *Star* to run a front-page item headed "Andy Cole", informing readers that the Burnley striker wouldn't be prosecuted over allegations of assaulting his wife, contrary to what it had reported on 26 February under the headline "FOOTIE STAR COLE IS WIFE BEATER".

But wait a minute. The *Star* had already printed a grovelling apology to Andy Cole and his wife Shirley for that story, as long ago as 1 March. ("We realise on reflection that our report was sensationalist and understand it may have caused unnecessary offence. The *Daily Star* is sorry for any upset we have caused the Coles.") The paper is well-known for its two-for-one offers, but two apologies for the same story?

It is surely pure coincidence that Cole's agent Paul Stretford also represents the spud-faced nipper Wayne Rooney, who has signed a deal worth £2.5m with Dirty Des's *OK!* magazine for pictures of his wedding.

CHILDREN ARE NO LONGER SEEN IN THIS BUILDING

PLEASE GO TO THE
RICHARD DESMOND CHILDREN'S EYE CENTRE
ON PEERLESS STREET

Moorfields Eye Hospital

RUMOURS persist that the *Telegraph*'s PR smoothie Guy Black has secured a knighthood for his boss Murdoch Maclennan. Might this explain why the paper has recently been so surprisingly positive about Gordon Brown? Or is that explained by the close friendship between the *Telegraph*'s new political editor, Andrew Porter, and Schools Secretary Ed Balls?

Last week's story about a flare-up between Balls and Jack Straw, originally carried in Rachel Sylvester's *Telegraph* comment column, was followed lustily by many Fleet Street lobby hacks – but not by Porter. Although the *Telegraph* newsdesk was "hot for the story", he considered it unworthy of his attention. The *Sun*'s George Pascoe-Watson and the *Times*'s Philip Webster were similarly "minded" not to give the tale much coverage.

Can this have anything to do with the football-and-golf friendship between these three political editors and a certain Ed Balls?

YELLOW is the colour, according to a double-page spread in the *Guardian*'s Saturday magazine on 5 April, which featured models galore wearing banana-coloured fashions.

Not so fast! Four pages later, that unchallengeable style arbiter "The Measure" column had this urgent message in its "Going Down" section: "Wearing yellow. Dispatch from the changing rooms: banana yellow may be fashionable again, but it hasn't got any more flattering."

EVER since Robert Maxwell ran off with the pension fund, *Mirror* executives have been famed for their confusion with figures. And it seems outgoing *Sunday Mirror* features editor Nicky Dawson is no exception.

Off to the *Daily Mail* as Femail number two, Dawson has been telling all and sundry that she is, actually, number one. Mathematics are clearly a tricky area for sharp-as-a-spoon Dawson. Asked by a hack recently whether she fancied a "chat with a family of sextuplets", she replied seamlessly: "Yes! How many are there?"

"I hear they are very post-neanderthal"

ECCENTRIC coverage from *Daily Telegraph* golf correspondent Lewine Mair in the run-up to the US Masters last week.

In one piece she hyped up the chances of English golfer Nick Dougherty; in another she gave a sympathetic hearing to Colin Montgomerie's complaints at being omitted from the invitation-only tournament in favour of Chinese players who, he suspects, are only there to boost eastern TV audiences.

Readers may have been puzzled by the focus on two British players, one of whom clearly wouldn't win while the other simply couldn't since he wasn't even participating. Why not write about golfers who actually stand a chance in the Masters?

FACT: Dougherty and Montgomerie are represented by the sports and entertainment agency IMG, where the golf PR manager is one Michele Mair – Lewine Mair's daughter!

NEW *Times* editor James Harding has a new weapon to get rid of staff he doesn't want. He doesn't sack them – he promotes them to newly created non-jobs.

First he eased out deputy editor Ben Preston in January by making him "international editor". Preston put up with that humiliation for less than a fortnight before he walked.

Now the same has happened to Sandra Parsons, editor of *Times2*. As the *Eye* reported, Parsons was convinced that other female executives on the paper had their eye on her job, and so it proved. Harding gave the *Times2* job to Emma Tucker and made Parsons "head of features" – a job that previously didn't exist.

"She will take charge of news features and champion courageous reporting and sensitive story-telling throughout the *Times*," Harding announced. Like Preston, Parsons saw the writing on the wall. Last week she walked to the *Daily Mail*.

***DAILY Telegraph* editor Will Lewis doesn't seem to be the sort of chap who does sackings face to face.**

For the latest round of redundancies, which saw science correspondent Nic Fleming, social affairs writer Sarah Womack and veteran religious affairs correspondent Jonathan Petre thrown out of the building, Lewis was on holiday. The dirty work was entrusted instead to his cadaverous sidekick Tony Gallagher, former news editor of the *Daily Mail*.

The sacking of Petre shortly before this summer's Lambeth Conference, when the Archbishop of Canterbury may face open revolt from various church wonks, was strangely timed. The *Telegraph*'s "churches correspondent" (as it used to be called) was once one of the more important figures in the Establishment; previous incumbents include Richard Chartres, now Bishop of London. But as one poor wretch left on the *Telegraph*'s burning deck puts it: "The new regime here don't have much time for Christianity. They had their eye on Petre for a while. He didn't have a prayer." Which, for a religious affairs expert, is an unusual position.

While jettisoning religion, science and social affairs, Gallagher found time to demonstrate the *Maily Telegraph*'s priorities last week by creating an entirely new post – "showbiz editor". Can a daily horoscope be far behind?

O·B·N

"I think every decade has an iconic blonde, like Marylin Monroe or Princess Diana, and right now I'm that icon," she said more than a year ago in these very pages. The comparisons were telling and accurate, for she has undoubtedly become our Diana – one of the most hunted, most Googled, desired and objectified commodities on the planet. But crucially, unlike the Princess, she has done it all herself. Like some MySpace savant she is fully in charge of her own exploitation. She is a Youtube princess for a generation raised on Pop Idol spin-offs and the transformative powers of an omnipotent celebocracy."

KEVIN MAHER on Paris Hilton
The Times

Submitted by Jayesh Shah

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

WHEN, in 2002, the *Daily Mail*'s New York correspondent Daniel Jeffreys was sacked for fabricating an "eyewitness account" of a criminal being executed in Georgia, a furious Paul Dacre pledged a clampdown on bogus datelines.

Six years on, however, the *Mail*'s foreign stringers are still not all they seem. Foremost among them is the paper's current New York correspondent Barry Wigmore.

The prolific Wigmore, a close personal friend of *Mail* veteran foreign editor Gerry Hunt, has apparently written a series of impressive dispatches from the US this year – despite not actually being there. Until a few months ago he covered New York from his holiday home in Parrish, Florida, only a few miles from Tampa Bay but about 500 miles from Manhattan. Following a move across the Atlantic last December to be closer to his wife's ageing mother, he now files from a house near Reading, Berkshire. Hunt sends him agency copy every morning, and Wigmore re-writes it for a fee of £400 a time.

Wigmore is merely one among many well-paid but spectacularly absent foreign stringers for the *Mail*. Others include a "Paris correspondent" who lives in a country house 500 miles away in Provence, and an "Athens correspondent" currently residing on a small island some 200 miles away from the Greek capital.

Meanwhile, younger hacks on the paper are told that a bar has been put on foreign travel because of the expense. Asked recently how they were supposed to keep readers informed about the world's major news centres and trouble spots, Hunt replied: "There's always Google."

SECONDS out, round two, in the "Beauty and the Breasts" rivalry between *Daily Telegraph* hackettes Celia "the Beauty" Walden and Bryony "the Breasts" Gordon in their bid to gain as many photo by-lines and front-page puffs as possible.

Gordon landed the first punch. "Breasts, breasts, glorious breasts," she wrote on 27 March. "Show me someone who thinks about them as much as a man does, and I'll show you a woman. Indeed, for every male currently pondering the beauty of breasts, I can guarantee that there are at least five females also thinking about them."

Not to be outdone, The Beauty hit back with an article on 2 April, headlined "Welcome to my comfort zone", in which she described how "dressing up comes easily to me" and boasted of owning no fewer than "15 pairs of slim-fitting jeans" – complete with a photograph of a full-length purring Celia.

Telegraph editor Will Lewis couldn't be happier. Keep it up, girls!

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOILS

PETER BINGLE of the Bell Pottinger public relations agency looked the very model of a modern corporate manager when he appeared before the Commons public administration committee's inquiry into political lobbying.

When MPs asked if he and his colleagues would ever help a vicious regime, Bingle looked pained. "We had a call asking us to advise Zimbabwe," he replied. "We said, 'Thank you very much, but no.' That would have been, I think, a very malign campaign. Often if we get a call from an overseas client, we would talk to the Foreign Office, take a view, look at whether or not actually we would want to work for that kind of country or a particular company."

No need for regulation, then. No need for the government to compel lobbyists to reveal whose interests they are serving. No need for parliament to force them to admit to putting former civil servants and ministers on the payroll the better to exploit their contacts. No need even for Bell Pottinger to abide by the feeble standards set by the lobbyist trade associations it refuses to join.

"The Bell Pottinger brand, I think, is very special," Bingle blustered. "I have been there seven years. I have known Lord Bell many, many years and I do not believe that Tim would allow us to do anything that was not appropriate."

Alas, Bingle had bungled.

A week after he went to the Commons, the Foreign Office he claims to consult was infuriated by the sight of Lord "Tim" Bell cosying up to Alexander Lukashenko, ruler of Belarus, the last dictatorship in Europe.

The Tory PR man, who helped Margaret Thatcher dominate British politics, and the former Communist, who has retained the censorship and rigged elections of the Soviet empire, did not let their ideological differences get in the way of business. Bell offered to give Lukashenko a better image in the west. Lukashenko offered to give Bell a lot of money.

"You will find working in our country pleasant," the old brute told Bell. "We are counting on the fact that you will be a goodwill ambassador from Britain, with which we have actively developing relations, despite vicissitudes in the political realm."

The vicissitudes of political life in Belarus hit democrats the hardest. The state harasses opposition parties, while Lukashenko sets his goons on peaceful protesters. The latest outrage was at the end of last month, when thousands gathered in Minsk to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the short-lived Belarus National Republic Lenin and the Bolsheviks crushed. The authorities arrested 70 and sent 26 to prison for such crimes as shouting "shame!" and "long live Belarus!" at the police.

Bell told Lukashenko that he had browsed the internet and found double standards and hypocrisy in western condemnations of Belarus. In private conversations with business hacks, he declared that the Foreign Office had no moral right to criticise the attacks on freedom of speech when evangelical Christians could be arrested for criticising homosexuality in the UK. What's the difference?

Nikolai Khalezin and Natalia A. Koliada of the Belarus Free Theatre pointed out a few, in an open letter to Bell. In Britain, for instance, deputy speakers of the House of Commons do not share the fate of Victor Gonchar – vice-speaker of the Belarusian parliament – missing, presumed murdered, after opposing Lukashenko. David Cameron faces many troubles as leader of the opposition. But he does not have to worry about being beaten and imprisoned for challenging the ruling party. The Belarusian opposition leader Alexander Kozulin was not so fortunate. He went down for five years in 2006.

'Ratbiter'

Libel News

IN THE last *Eye* we warned that critics of Tesco can now expect "aggressive legal action" from the increasingly twitchy retail monster. As if to confirm the point, a couple of days later Tesco's lawyers – the inevitable Peter Carter-Fuck and Partners – started legal proceedings against the *Guardian* and editor Alan Rusbridger for both libel and "malicious falsehood" over recent articles about the company's offshore tax-avoidance schemes involving companies in the Cayman Islands and trusts in Jersey.

Tesco doesn't deny the schemes' existence: indeed they were exposed here last March (*Eye* 1180) almost a year before the *Guardian*'s "revelations". It merely claims that the newspaper overstated the amount of tax saved (tens of millions, rather than the hundreds of millions alleged by the *Guardian*) and claimed incorrectly that the purpose was to avoid corporation tax rather than stamp duty land tax on property sales.

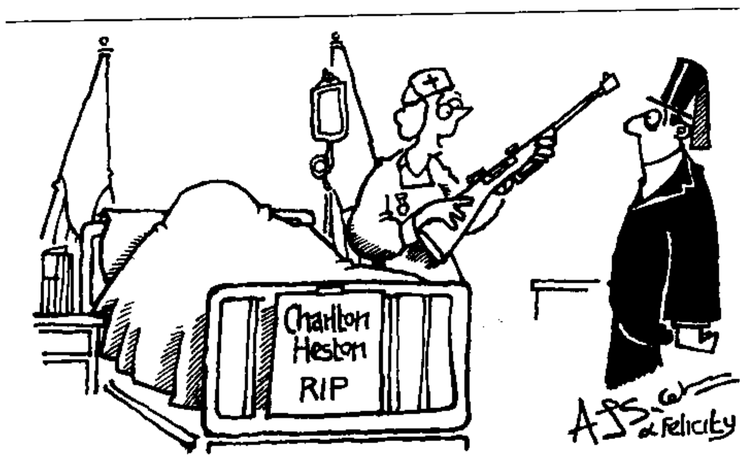
There's a loud echo here of Tesco's current blitz against a newspaper columnist and a former MP in Thailand, who are being sued for $32m and $3m respectively for their comments about the company's rapid expansion (see last *Eye*). Both defendants admit they made a factual error in suggesting that 37 percent of Tesco's global revenue now comes from its Thai stores – but point out that the error doesn't invalidate their argument about the Tescoisation of Thailand and can't possibly justify the scale of damages being demanded.

The same hysterical lack of proportion is evident in this case. Tesco is demanding "special damages" from the *Guardian*, and reserves the right to sue for "loss of profits", because the articles prompted some customers to shun the store. But how much profit did it lose? So far the company has produced just five letters or emails from shoppers who withdrew their custom. One wrote to say that he'd planned to buy cocktail sausages and ice-cubes for a drinks party from Tesco, but after reading about the Cayman Islands scheme he "drove an extra half-mile to Sainsbury's" and bought the sausages there – only to have to visit Tesco after all because Sainsbury's had run out of ice.

Losing the nibbles account for a suburban party is peanuts (or indeed cocktail-sausages) compared to what Tesco can expect to lose from public revulsion at its legal intimidation of critics. Perhaps Tesco's creepy legal affairs director Lucy Neville-Rolfe (who, bizarrely, isn't actually a qualified lawyer) will advise Tesco to sue itself for the "loss of profits" caused by its litigious excesses.

The legal bombardment mounted by Neville-Rolfe and Carter-Fuck could backfire disastrously. *Grauniad* lawyers reckon they have a solid "Reynolds defence" to the libel claim – which may explain why Tesco is also suing for malicious falsehood, where the Reynolds defence doesn't apply. But in malicious falsehood cases the onus is on the plaintiff rather than the defendant.

To prove that the articles were untrue, Tesco will need to produce documents and figures showing precisely how its offshore tax-scheme works – leading to yet more unwelcome publicity. It will also have to show that Rusbridger and his paper were motivated by malice against Tesco, which is no easy task. If the *Grauniad* hates the supermarket group so intensely, why did it happily allow its own chief executive, Carolyn McCall, to sit on the board of Tesco for the past three years?



"I took this from his cold, dead hands"

RED FACES at the Ministry of Justice, the government department responsible for the freedom of information act, where officials have been found in breach of... freedom of information law in their attempts to cover up embarrassing details of their bosses' junketing!

When last year the *Eye* asked the MoJ for its "hospitality registers", which were supposedly available on request, the then permanent secretary Alex Allan intervened to block publication (*Eye* 1198). This prompted a humiliating slap on the wrist from the Information Commissioner and now, several months later, the release of information on the extensive schmoozing of the mandarins responsible for British justice.

Junketer-in-chief is finance director Barbara Moorhouse, entertained on 47 occasions since taking the job in 2005 to the end of 2006. For some reason her generous hosts tended to be the firms to whom she would be writing generous cheques.

Among the big earners from the department are Logica CMG and ATOS, winners in 2005 of around £500m worth of IT contracts covering everything from legal aid to magistrates' court administration on which they will be negotiating payments for seven years. Keeping in with its paymasters, Logica was soon taking Moorhouse for dinner, followed the next month by "drinks and dinner" at the Vintners Hall. Software supplier to the department Oracle weighed in with a dinner at the Walbrook club. ATOS, meanwhile, entertained the department's "e-delivery" director at a "fundraising dinner".

Among the many other consultants enjoying Ms Moorhouse's company were the ubiquitous PwC and KPMG. PwC were awarded 13 contracts worth £1.4m in 2005/06 alone, KPMG picking up 11 worth £1m.

Other top brass didn't miss out. The Legal Services Commission's former chief Brian Harvey eased the pain of slashing the legal aid budget and wasting millions on crap IT with the perfect bullshitter's soirée: a "business leaders wine tasting and dinner" from Blue Sky Consulting.

NEW Labour has fallen victim to an unusual act of cyber-squatting after a row with the company that for years produced many of its MPs' websites.

In the past, visitors to www.labour.co.uk were offered a link to Labour's slick main .org.uk site, as well as an introduction to the "web-in-a-box" service available to Labour MPs, MEPs and local associations. Now the same website plays host to an angry account of how "new" Labour fell out with Copernicus Ltd, which has provided and hosted these ready-made websites for Labour since 2000.

Party member Allen Jones, managing director of Copernicus, was shocked to discover that Labour had run a tender for MPs' websites – without telling him. Despite providing more than 200 Labour-related websites, his firm had been entirely left out of the process. When he took the matter up with the party, it did apologise, admitting that its failure to tell him about the plans was "unprofessional and discourteous". Then it offered him £5,000 to transfer users to a competitor's system.

MPs who transferred to new provider Tangent Labs don't seem to be getting a great deal. For instance, rather than the memorable address grahamallen.labour.co.uk, the Nottingham North MP can now be found at www.labouronline.org/wibs/167192/.

AS DEFENCE officials argue over cuts to several crucial projects, the Ministry of Defence has finally signed its record £13bn PFI deal for in-flight fighter refuelling aircraft. And it hasn't made the best start.

The planes will be owned and run by a consortium, Airtanker, led by European defence company EADS. But with the ink not yet dry on the PFI contract, the firm has been charged by French authorities with insider-dealing and misleading the stock market in 2005. Airtanker's chief executive Robin Southwell also has a less than glorious history, having been forced to resign as boss of PFI cock-up veteran WS Atkins in 2003 following a 72 percent share price drop.

The dubious consortium has the RAF over a barrel. At the end of the 27-year contract, the refuelling planes will be owned by the company, not the RAF, in order to satisfy the military imperative of, er, keeping the PFI commitment off the government's books. In the meantime, the consortium's own members, including Rolls Royce and VT, will clean up on running and maintaining the planes – a cosy arrangement bearing an uncanny resemblance to the one that screwed the Metronet underground consortium (one of whose members was WS Atkins, with Southwell at the helm when it was signed).

CALLED TO ORDURE

SHORTLY before MPs disappeared on their spring holiday, Gordon Brown held another of his monthly press conferences at 10 Downing Street. Broon inherited these American-style events from Tony Blair and has given them a special flavour all of his own: ie they are now stupendously dull and pointless.

Blair used the press conferences to try to mould the news agenda, by-pass parliament and project an air of businesslike endeavour.

Brown, *au contraire*, is laughably inept and gives the impression of being blown this way and that by events – as the latest press conference showed.

The swanky TV correspondents always get first bite at asking questions, and with the Beeb's Nick Robinson absent the opening query went to Sky's political editor Adam Boulton. He asked about a parliamentary report on immigration. Brown responded with an excruciating dump of waffle which lasted for seven minutes. Given that the press conferences only run an hour, this was a large chunk of proceedings to devote to the first answer.

At the end of Brown's mega first answer it was the turn of ITN's Tom Bradby. "So, to be clear..." he began. In other words: "Let's try again, Prime Minister, because your first answer was so unbelievably windy it was totally unusable for the evening news bulletins." Brown duly launched into another epic reply. The only interesting moment was when he distanced himself from the Blair regime, boasting how immigration procedures had improved "since June when I took over".

Bob Roberts, political editor of the ultra-loyal *Daily Mirror*, was becoming desperate for a good news story. He begged the PM to "let people know when things are going to get better rather than worse". Brown replied that he had frozen petrol duty for a few months. Great!

Brown was in the middle of a reply to an over-the-top American TV journalist (who had called him "Mister Prime Minister") when a terrible din was heard outside. This turned out to be the Red Arrows doing a flypast to mark the 90th anniversary of the RAF. Did Gordon have a pre-cooked soundbite about our brave pilots? Did he have any announcement to hand about the Armed Forces? Nah. Hadn't thought of it, or maybe couldn't be bothered.

With the clock moving on and reporters increasingly desperate for a news angle, Brown started talking about "the third stage of public sector reform" – rehashing a speech he had made an hour or two earlier to a gathering of civil servants. Jaws dropped floorwards. Pens were snapped. A couple of reporters walked out.

Brown was asked about Zimbabwe. Maybe he would come up with a striking soundbite on that? Alas not.

Hacks were now almost howling in desperation. A Spaniard wondered what Brown had made of Carla Bruni. Dull reply. How about Harriet Harman's stab-vest cock-up.

Another dead bat. As a last gambit a man from the *Sun* asked what the PM made of cheating soccer players. Gordon gave some reply about how "there are some great team captains who could take more responsibility".

Might the same not be true in politics, where team captains did a bit more to get their parties some decent headlines? Labour MPs certainly think so.

'Gavel Basher'

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

GIVEN the acute nature of the worldwide credit crunch, you might expect all members of the European Commission to take their financial responsibilities deadly seriously. Not so, apparently, Charlie McCreevy, commissioner of the internal market, whose officially stated ambitions include developing a roadmap to help put a lid on the global economic threat.

At a recent full plenary session of the European parliament to discuss the EU's mammoth plan to harmonise and upgrade its financial legislation, the former Irish minister of finance failed to show. The chairwoman of the economic and finance committee, Pervenche Berès, wanted to know why; but when she phoned McCreevy's office a spokesperson said they had been told not to disclose McCreevy's whereabouts. A little research revealed that he was at the Cheltenham Festival.

MEPs weren't happy as this was not the first time McCreevy had failed to show up. Last year, when he was due to attend a committee meeting to discuss tax harmonisation, he set out his position in writing before going to the races.

He recently got his comeuppance at another financial committee meeting. This time McCreevy did grace the podium with his presence, but proceedings kicked off with Berès sternly presenting him with a plastic horse, the plaything sporting both a harness and saddle in a shocking baby pink.

EU-phemisms

Embezzle everything before the whole place goes bust

MAN IN THE EYE

GEOFFREY SPENCE

WHO better to advise Chancellor Alistair Darling through the economic doldrums ahead than a proven banker whose last employer came close to financial collapse when the sub-prime, funny money bubble burst?

Darling has just invited Geoffrey Spence (*Eyes passim*) to join his Council of Economic Advisers – and the invitation is timely. Though Spence has moved back and forth between banking and the Treasury over recent years (see *Eyes passim*), he only left his latest job last month after the Australian finance house he worked for fell victim to what *The Australian* newspaper called "the usual combination of greed and arrogance".

From last July to March Spence worked for Allco as head of its European Infrastructure division. While Allco grew rapidly through various investments, including Spence's European expansion, many turned out to have been based on massive debt clouded by opaque "financial engineering". Allco also had its own sub-prime mortgage business in Australia called Mobius which suffered a lot of defaults.

Allco eventually lost nearly £2bn of value and shrank to a tenth its former size. Part of the rescue plan now involves offloading the European infrastructure investment built up by Spence. He, it seems, was offloaded in the process.

In his new advisory post, Spence will be paid "on the normal civil service rates", says the Treasury. Thus it is that the chancellor has hired an executive from a bank that helped pump up the credit bubble to advise him on how to deal with the resulting financial meltdown.

Darling's new "wise man" was of course head of Gordon Brown's private finance unit at the Treasury from 2002 to 2004; but his commitment to PFI goes back to early 1997 when, as a banker for Deutsche Morgan Grenfell, he lobbied the then Conservative government to agree one of the first hospital PFI schemes.

The Tories weren't able to pass the deal before losing the general election, but the New Labour government obliged. Spence specifically pushed the Dartford Hospital PFI, which reduced beds from 520 to 409. As a result the trust couldn't treat enough patients to pay for the PFI rebuild and went £5m into the red. It also dropped to a one star rating and lost its management. So just the man for the job.

KEN V. BORIS: MAYOR CULPA

BUMBLING Boris's campaign for election as London mayor faced an early setback when he was made to answer questions about his support for the disgraced former *Telegraph* boss Conrad Black.

When it was revealed that Johnson had provided Black with a character reference, Ken Livingstone wasted no time in haranguing his rival over his relationship with the convicted fraudster.

However, back in the 1980s Leninspart was embarrassingly close to a press baron of a very different stripe – the late Gerry Healy, leader of the ultra-spartist Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), whose character is summed up by Andrew Hosken in his new biography of Livingstone, *Ken*, thus: "…he was a serial rapist and abuser of vulnerable young women, a violent drunken oaf, a celebrity-obsessed sycophant, a sectarian demagogue, a vindictive bully, a political joke, a blatant anti-Semite… a possible accessory to torture and murder, a professional liar and a fraud as well as a pathetic stooge for sinister Middle East regimes". Nice chap.

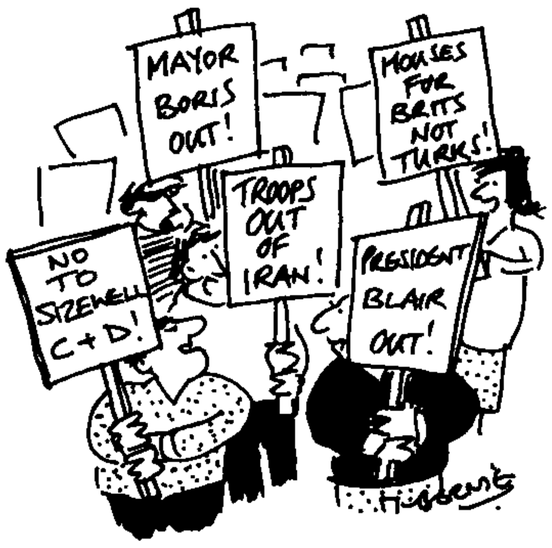
Yet between 1982 and 1984 Ken attended three successive WRP annual conferences and in 1989 went to Healy's funeral. In 1994, long after Healy's true character had been revealed, Ken wrote: "It was a privilege to have worked with Gerry Healy."

In 1981 Ken, then leader of the Greater London Council, and Lambeth council's "Red" Ted Knight launched a left-wing weekly newspaper called the *Labour Herald*. Stories in *Eyes* 515 and 517 claimed that Livingstone had taken money from Libya's Colonel Gaddafi to finance the new paper. Livingstone sued for libel and in 1983 the *Eye* apologised, acknowledged there was "no truth" in the allegation and paid Ken, Knight and another Lambeth councillor damages and costs.

In a fascinating chapter in *Ken*, however, Hosken reveals that, although Livingstone may not have known it at the time, the *Labour Herald* certainly did depend on Gaddafi's money to survive. (Ken tells Hosken he can't remember if he ever asked Healy about Libyan money.) In the years between 1977 and 1983, the WRP received more than £500,000 from Gaddafi (and nearly £20,000 from Saddam Hussein's Iraq). Some of this was used to buy a state-of-the-art colour press on which the WRP printed its daily newspaper, *Newsline*, and the *Labour Herald* – Healy having offered Livingstone and Knight a very good deal to print the paper cheaply.

In October 1985, Healy's erstwhile comrades turned on their corrupt leader and kicked him out of the WRP. Six weeks later both *Newsline* and the *Labour Herald* were dead.

BORIS JOHNSON, meanwhile, has attacked the capital's "cyclist-crushing" bendy buses, claiming that a modern Routemaster would be much safer. But first attempts to design such a new bus suggest that Mayor Johnson would actually make London *more* dangerous for cyclists.



"We're in training for the 2012 Olympics"

As the Johnson campaign cranked into action, *Autocar*, a magazine owned by former Tory minister Michael Heseltine, published designs it had commissioned for a "Routemaster bus for the 21st century". Boris duly called the design "fabulous". But is it?

By making the 2D vehicle longer and wider than the biggest of the old Routemasters, the designers managed to fit in seats for up to 76 passengers, despite the whole of the front being taken up by a driver's cab, wheelchair area and front entrance. Shortening the bus would reduce its capacity and make it less cost-effective.

The problem is Johnson's irrational obsession with buses that look like Routemasters, which means he wants the front wheels to be tucked just behind the headlamps, a low rear entrance platform and wasted space alongside the cab. For decades bus designers have put the engine at the back (using the space above it for seats). That allows for a low entrance platform at the front, with the front wheels much further back than on the Routemaster. Bringing the front and rear axles closer together lessens the lateral sweep of the section between the axles when the bus turns, so reducing the risk of "cyclist crushing".

So how do the 21st-century Routemaster and bendybus compare on wheelbases (distances between axles)? London's Mercedes Citaro G bendybus has wheelbases of 5.85 metres and 5.99 metres. *Autocar*'s new Routemaster has a wheelbase of 6.54 metres (which *Autocar* admits is 12 percent more than the old Routemaster) – so it would crab across the road at corners even more than the hated bendybus. Fabulous indeed.

Down on the Farm

THE RSPCA, our leading animal charity, receives more than £100m a year in donations from a munificent public. It keeps the bequests flooding in not least by paying some £200,000 a week to its network of high street solicitors to act for it in prosecuting farmers and others for cruelty, ensuring through its publicity machine that these cases get maximum publicity.

Typical was the spate of coverage the RSPCA won in January for raiding Spindles Farm in Amersham, Bucks, when 125 horses and donkeys were seized from farmer James Gray, in what seemed an open and shut case.

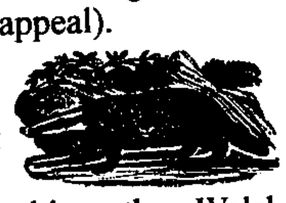
As reported here before, however (see *Eyes* 1201 and 1203), the RSPCA's methods had already been coming under heavy fire from a succession of judges and magistrates. Several of its cases were thrown out, notably in Harwich, Portsmouth and Norwich. Seized animals which had survived the RSPCA's animal establishments were ordered to be returned to their owners. The charity was repeatedly criticised for preparing witnesses, with the aid of pro-forma statements and pre-trial meetings, in defiance of court rules.

Also widely reported was the RSPCA's killing in December of Gangotri, an injured cow in a Hertfordshire Hindu temple, although the RSPCA kills more than 65,000 animals a year (thousands of them entirely healthy). The monks were outraged by the RSPCA's entry to "euthanise" the animal, claiming to have a court warrant. No warrant was, in fact, even applied for until the next day.

Several large Hindu demonstrations in Parliament Square and at the charity's Horsham HQ were supported by farmers and others, protesting at the RSPCA's growing officiousness. MPs queued up to sign an early-day motion deploring the Gangotri incident, and the Hindus are now seeking redress in the high court.

This may help explain what happened when the Spindle's farm case came up in Oxford this month before Judge Sandeep Kainth. The court heard from an independent equine vet that none of the animals seized from Gray had actually been "caused unnecessary suffering", and conditions at the farm were of "extremely good quality".

Although the case is not concluded, Judge Kainth ordered the RSPCA to return 29 animals to Mr Gray forthwith and the rest, as his lawyers asked, were to be sold at auction with the proceeds going to Mr Gray. Returning the animals to their owner "put them at no risk". Naturally this sent the RSPCA's publicity machine into overdrive, to explain how its efforts had met with such an unexpected reverse (it now wants Mr Gray to pay £153,000 which it says it spent looking after the animals, and is considering an appeal).



The RSPCA's "Campaigns, Media and Science" department (annual cost £7.4m) again went into overdrive, supported as usual by the BBC, in attacking the Welsh Assembly's decision to allow the culling of TB-infected badgers. Bovine TB is decimating Welsh cattle herds, but Radio 4's *Today* programme meekly permitted an activist to repeat the well-rehearsed claim that there is no evidence that culling badgers reduces the incidence of TB in cattle.

Today failed to explain that, in the days when culling infected badgers was still legal, bovine TB was completely eradicated. Only when the culling of infected badgers was banned in the 1980s did the problem reappear, eventually reaching today's epidemic proportions. The government says the cost of TB to taxpayers alone will soon exceed £2bn. However, to the RSPCA, an infected badger is as much a sacred animal as Gangotri was to the Hindus.

'Muckspreader'

TV Eye

Britain's Got Talent (ITV1)

DESPERATELY needing a hit to appease critics and advertisers, ITV1 must have come with relief to the 2008 version of its surprise ratings triumph of last year: *Britain's Got Talent.*

But there's no such thing as a guaranteed watch in television. There was always the risk that the new run might fail to recreate the excitement of the original contest, in which mobile phone salesman and near-Cambodian-tyrant-soundalike, Paul Potts, proved to be an unacknowledged Pavarotti. But the producers' promise is that the sequel will be even better than last year.

This is going to be difficult, given that all of the essential elements of the format are identical. The three judges are back, each with the same repertoire of two respective expressions. Simon Cowell has a default bored scowl, which is occasionally swapped for wide-eyed surprise and a mouthed "what the?" when he sees an act that might make some money for one of his record labels. Amanda Holden shifts between the vacant simper of a woman trying to pretend she hasn't seen the guy eyeing her across the bar, and tearful helplessness when the act involves a kid or a kitten. And Piers Morgan chooses between a hostile smirk and a friendly smirk.

It was Piers, though, who had come up with the line on why it was worth buying shares in *BGT 2008*. Last year, the winner's prize of a place at the Royal Variety Performance only took place in front of Queen Elizabeth II; but this time it would be the Prince of Wales in the royal box. This, insisted the top financial tipster, increased the pressure on contestants.

"He's probably more in tune with a range of variety acts than his mother," editoralised Morgan, "and he's going to be our king!" Apart from the fact that Brenda actually is a monarch, while Charles may or may not become one, depending on where the shoes fall, this claim of raised stakes is also laughable because of the suggestion that the Prince of Wales would be sitting there like a reincarnated Lew Grade, muttering out of the side of his mouth about whether the kid had what it takes to break the Palladium, when everyone knows that the Windsors are raised with a grim sense of duty and, even if required to meet Piers Morgan, would allow in their expressions no suggestion that he might be a smug twat who was lucky not to be jailed for insider-dealing.

"I wonder who'll be the first to leave this programme and go upstairs to read a book?"

Even so, this dull and illogical conceit was maintained throughout the 75-minute series premiere. "D'ya reckon Prince Charles will laik th'act?," perked Ant & Dec as they stood with contestants in the green room or wings. One of the strange things about this programme is that the Geordie duo don't actually host the main part of the proceedings, but commentate from the side, occasionally adding a "Wow!" or "My favourite so far!" This is presumably because they are seen to have a human touch the judges lack.

Also eerily identical to last year was the clunkily imposed narrative in the regional heats. As tuneless crooners were succeeded by ham-fisted illusionists, Cowell's face would become more and more furious with boredom, while Dec & Ant expressed dismay on voice-over that London or Cardiff or Manchester was failing to deliver the goods. Then, just in time, an angelic vocalist would make Cowell mouth "What the?" and Holden cry.

Apart from the fact that this trick is so manipulative – the producers are clearly sending on the no-hopers first – there's again the worry that the programme is failing in its duty of care to some of the contestants. At least three of the performers, one of whom appeared to make a direct threat of violence to Cowell, seemed to have potential mental health issues beyond a self-delusion about their talent, and are unlikely to have been helped by being held up to national ridicule.

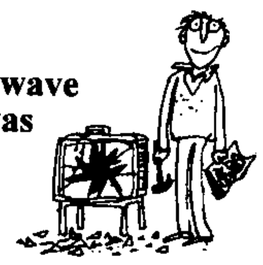
The star of the opening round was a lady contortionist, who provided another example of the show's queasy double-standards. After she had swung her head between her legs while supporting herself on her elbows, Morgan smirked: "Do you have a boyfriend?", while Cowell sniggered: "The Prince of Wales will love you." This was presumably supposed to trigger an image of the heir to the throne bent double over the *Kama Sutra* with Camilla, but it wasn't spelled out because, of course, this is a family show.

Last year the show was at least over in a week; but such is ITV's desperation that the second stretch will last for seven. There's every sign that *Britain's Got Talent 2008* may be something else that Piers Morgan has to tell everyone he didn't know about.

'Remote Controller'

COMING UP...
A STORY OF GREED...
DECEPTION...
ARTFULNESS...
five news
AND NOT TELLING MY NEW EMPLOYERS IT WAS DUE IN NINE MONTHS
£ CONTRACT
PAY NATASHA KAPLINSKY £1LLIONS TO READ THE NEWS

MEDIA NEWS



AL JAZEERA, rocked by a wave of resignations (see last *Eye*), was accentuating the positive when it came to the Zimbabwe elections.

"Remember," crowed presenter Kamahl Santamaria, "that Al Jazeera is the only news channel reporting live and exclusive from inside Zimbabwe."

The fact that all other serious TV news organisations have been banned for their critical reporting of Mugabe's regime did not make it to the autocue. A clue as to how Al Jaz has tenaciously maintained its exclusive access came in Santamaria's backgrounder which began: "Here's why ZANU-PF remains popular with large numbers of Zimbabweans..." It went on to detail ZANU-PF's leadership role in "winning independence from Britain". The role of rival liberation army ZIPRA was not mentioned, nor was the fact that many MDC opposition leaders also participated in the liberation struggle. Clearly this would have complicated things too much – and jeopardized Al Jaz's status as Mugabe's favourite TV channel.

IN A profile of "charismatic local entrepreneur" Simon Hume-Kendall, *Kent Life* magazine says he has "a finely tuned business sense – and a strong inkling of right and wrong". But although the article lists some of his interests it omits to mention that he is also a national newspaper proprietor.

Why so coy? Perhaps because the newspapers in question are the *Daily* and *Sunday Sport*. Hume-Kendall's company Interactive World, which supplies "adult content" for mobile phone users, bought the papers for £43m last September from porn barons David Sullivan and David and Ralph Gold. Sport Media Group plc, as Interactive World has renamed itself, also broadcasts the satellite porn channel SportXXXBabes ("red-hot raunchy hardcore action") and runs a phone-sex service ("Live 1-2-1 chat with real filthy women").

Down in Kent, where he is chairman of Tunbridge Wells Conservative Association, Kendall-Hume understandably prefers to be known as the owner of tourist attractions such as the Hop Farm at Paddock Wood and Lamberhurst Vineyard. Last autumn he was awarded a long-term contract to manage the leisure facilities at Bewl Water reservoir. Only a few months later he is already demanding higher rents from the various sailing groups that use the reservoir, and planning to convert their club house into a "luxury" restaurant overlooking the reservoir.

Despite panoramic views during the day, at night there will be nothing for diners to see. Still, he can always keep them entertained with TV screens showing his SportXXXBabes channel!

DUMB BRITAIN

2CR FM, Paul Bunker Show with Caroline Verdon

Paul Bunker: Question two. What year did the Titanic sink?

Caller: Oh blimey. It's got to be 1940-something. '45? Something like that?

Caroline Verdon: The year that the war started.

Paul: No, the war ended in '45, Caroline.

Caroline: My history is so bad.

Paul: OK, question three. Who painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel?

Same caller: Leonardo di Caprio.

Paul (*laughs*): We're all learning something here this morning. Who did you really mean?

Caller: It's Caprio-something, but I can't remember the first name.

GOING LIVE

DURING the build-up to last week's Liverpool v. Arsenal game, Radio 5 Live's drive-time show "went live" to its reporter at Anfield three hours before kick-off.

"What's it like there?" asked presenter Anita Anand.

"Well," came the reply, "it's empty at the moment… But there's always an aura at Anfield."

DESPITE airing on 1 April, Radio 4's fawning *Inside the British Council* was supposed to be a serious investigation of the UK's cultural mission abroad, as presenter Emily Maitlis learned how the council's soft diplomacy is winning hearts and minds in the Middle East.

The 40-minute programme made the very briefest mention of the controversial closure of offices around the world to free up cash for projects in the Islamic world, with no effort to question the shutting of libraries across Africa and the degree to which in many countries the council now does little more than recruit lucrative international students for British universities (*Eyes passim*).

But could the show's producers have been less than impartial to begin with? Besides making documentaries for the BBC, production company Just Radio also regularly produces "audio scenarios" for one of its major non-broadcast clients, which it describes as "the most innovative English language teaching network in the world". Yes – the British Council!

BIG MAC, as Channel 4 racing presenter John McCririck is known to colleagues, has been downsized into a Little Mac following the announcement of a drastic reduction in the number of days he appears on TV.

The reasons for his brutal truncation are something of a mystery. "Love him or hate him, John McCririck, self-styled punters' champion, has been racing's most identifiable face with the wider public for the past two decades," the *Daily Telegraph* observed, commenting that it was "hard to fathom" why the face was being eased off the screen. But it has emerged that the decision was taken personally by C4's new head of sport, Andrew Thompson, against the wishes of the horse-racing production company, Highflyer.

Andrew Thompson's wife, Alison Sharman, is ITV's director of factual and daytime programming. By a strange coincidence, over the past year or so John McCririck has twice been kicked off ITV chat-shows for being sexist. Both the programmes, *Loose Women* and *The Alan Titchmarsh Show*, are under the control of Alison Sharman. Could this have anything to do with Thompson's decision to get rid of McCririck? To judge by the splutterings and mutterings coming out of Big Mac, he certainly thinks so.

AD NAUSEAM

FOR the first time, more money will be spent advertising on the internet next year than on television, says a report published last week by the Internet Advertising Bureau.

For those of us who like to watch their television uninterrupted, this is good news. In adland, however, it's being seen as the death throes of a golden era, when advertisers threw cash at agencies who happily spent it on lavish productions (with 15 percent commission). If, in years to come, advertisers should want to know why TV advertising died, a cross-section of current car commercials offers at least one compelling theory.

The new Renault Twingo, for example, is tagged as "serious fun" in a TV spot involving banana skins and garden gnomes. All Renault's cars are great fun, it turns out – the Modus ad asks "Grow up – what for?" whereas the Laguna promises "serious playtime". Peugeot's 407 takes a radically different tack, informing us that, in fact, "Playtime is over". But not if you're in a Vauxhall Corsa, where a recent ad "put the fun back into driving" as cutesy little cars played hide and seek.

Not to be outdone, Mazda's 5 duly reminded us that "it's time to play". Nissan's Qashqai appears to be in wholehearted agreement, with its latest work showing the cuddly 4x4 at "play with the city". Much like Suzuki, which seems to have started this whole descent into the abyss when its Swift hatchback asked: "Wanna play?"

The demise of television advertising certainly has something to do with the proliferation of media channels, the rise of the internet and young people deserting telly. But could it also be connected to the fact that a large chunk of our TV advertising appears to have nothing left in the tank in terms of creativity?

EYE TOLD YOU SO

"NO fewer than 13 complaints against Ryanair's advertising have been upheld this year – time, surely, for the ASA to exercise the sole sanction that gives it any real potency and report Ryanair to the Office of Fair Trading?"

– *Ad Nauseam,* Eye *1196, 26 October 2007*

"The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has asked the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) to consider taking action against the budget airline Ryanair under the Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations 1988."

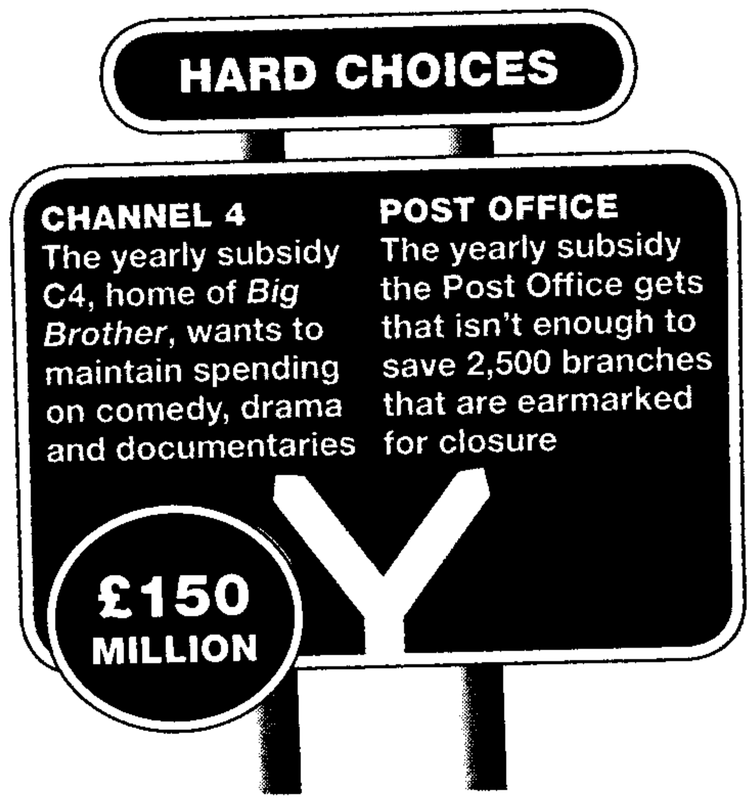
– *ASA press release, 9 April 2008*

I-SKY

"Thanks, then, to the publicity department of Sky Sports for daring to dream and thereby producing a landmark moment in pop-cultural iconography, not to mention a thematically resonant way to announce the arrival of the Premier League of darts next Thursday at a 9,000-seat venue in Liverpool."

– Sports columnist Giles Smith writing about a TV darts promotion, the *Times* (prop: R. Murdoch), 5 April.

HARD CHOICES


CHANNEL 4
The yearly subsidy C4, home of *Big Brother*, wants to maintain spending on comedy, drama and documentaries
POST OFFICE
The yearly subsidy the Post Office gets that isn't enough to save 2,500 branches that are earmarked for closure
£150 MILLION

OLYMPIAN FOLLY

IT WAS that old jackbooter Juan Antonio Samaranch, the Franco sports minister turned president of the International Olympic Committee, who arm-twisted his members to give the 2008 Olympics to China.

Only months after Chinese troops gunned down hundreds of civilians to avert "social chaos" at Tiananmen Square in 1989, Samaranch was urging Deng Xiaoping to bid for the 2000 Games. But how to draw a veil over the unfortunate bloodshed?

In Birmingham, two years after the massacre, Samaranch presented the IOC's highest honour, an Olympic Order, to Beijing mayor and bid leader Chen Xitong, lauding him as "an ardent defender of sport for youth". Perhaps the sport Samaranch had in mind was shooting unarmed students, for it was Chen himself who signed the order to send the army into Tiananmen Square.

In the spring of 1993, just months before the vote, Samaranch donned a woolly sweater for a bike ride with Chen across Tiananmen Square, smiling for photographers on the killing ground. Samaranch hoped that pictures of two old men on bikes might supplant the images of soldiers shooting civilians.

Samaranch, who was giving the fascist salute as recently as 1974 at a ceremony in his native Barcelona (see photo) while serving as IOC vice-president, was furious when Sydney beat China to host the 2000 Games. He redoubled his efforts and finally delivered the 2008 victory to Beijing in July 2001, days before he retired to become honorary president for life.

"If Beijing is allowed to host the Games, it will help the development of human rights," promised the city's deputy mayor, Liu Jingmin.

The Olympics, led for 21 years by an unrepentant fascist, has long been a gift to repressive regimes. Now forced to ponder why China has the Games, might British sports reporters also now ask themselves why for so long they turned a blind eye to Samaranch's fascism?

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Entrepreneurs, it seems, are the new celebrity chefs. Peter [Jones] prefers to call it 'the new rock 'n' roll'." – *Daily Mail.*

"Accountancy, it seems, is the new rock 'n' roll." – *Sunday Times.*

"Handel seems to be the new rock and roll." – *Daily Telegraph.*

"Darts is the new rock 'n' roll." – *Mail on Sunday.*

"Never mind the Lotto, try bingo… It's the new rock 'n' roll." – *Daily Star.*

"Gardening is the new rock 'n' roll." – *Guardian.*

"Hamilton are fast becoming the new rock and roll of Lanarkshire football." – *Sunday Times.*

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

MEDICINE BALLS

The politics of prostate cancer

WHY are men with early prostate cancer still being denied NICE-approved treatment? The disease kills 10,000 men a year, but the cancer is difficult to predict. In some it spreads rapidly and often presents too late for a cure; in others it remains localised in the prostate gland without causing any obvious harm. For the latter, radical surgery or radiotherapy may do more harm than good.

The research challenge is to develop better screening tests and identify those early cancers that are likely to spread. More localised treatments, which eradicate the cancer while sparing patients the misery of incontinence and impotence, are also needed. Brachytherapy, which inserts radioactive seeds into the prostate, is once such treatment for early cancer, and achieves as good a control of the disease as radical surgery with far fewer side effects. Indeed, it is the only minimally invasive treatment for the disease that is approved by NICE (February 2008).

This should, in theory, give a much better choice for men who decide they want to be tested for the disease and are found to have localised cancer. They can either choose to have surveillance rather than treatment, with the option of doing something later if the cancer starts to grow (NICE's preferred and cheapest option). Or they can choose to go straight for treatment, preferably with the fewest side effects.

Brachytherapy became available in the UK a decade a go, but many patients have been denied funding for it on the NHS. There was a blanket ban on all new NHS referrals from Wales between October 2005 and February 2007, and men are still being denied treatment, despite NICE approval.

Others have taken on their PCT and won. Roy Stainton is a retired professor of operational mathematics who was found to have localised prostate cancer in 2004. His consultant at Winchester hospital gave him a "prostate cancer treatment toolkit" to mull over, but tried to remove the section on brachytherapy because "the PCT will never fund it". Mr Stayton decided he wanted it and was swiftly declined.

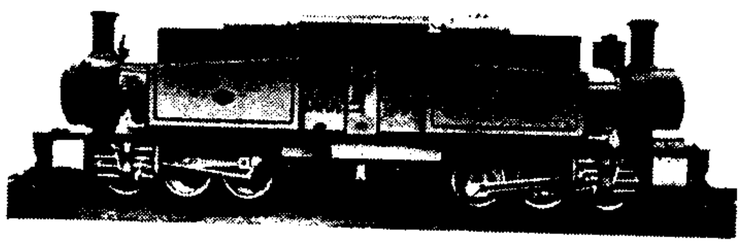
Appealing against South Hants PCT wasn't easy. His GP knew very little about brachytherapy and he was left alone to assemble his case. He read up on the research, used it to inform his arguments, gathered letters of support and lodged his appeal. He was offered a hearing and the chance to respond to contrary evidence by the end of the day on which the letter arrived. He quickly reviewed the evidence and delivered his response by hand. He was also invited to take a medical representative with him, which he didn't have, and although the nice lady from the Patient Advocacy Liaison Service was keen, she didn't know anything about brachytherapy either.

At the hearing, the PCT mislaid his supplementary evidence, which was subsequently photocopied and circulated. Mr Stainton's statistical analysis showed that, when all convalescence costs were considered, brachytherapy was no more expensive than radical surgery, and cheaper in the long term if side effects were avoided. New Labour would no doubt claim this was patient advocacy in action. In reality, you're on your own and it helps if you're a statistical genius.

For every successful appeal, there are many more losers. Men are re-mortgaging their houses and going to small private clinics rather than larger specialist centres with the expertise to do brachytherapy properly. The NICE guidance should finally end this, and make high quality treatment available to all who choose it, but don't bank on it.

● *For more information visit www.prostatebrachytherapyinfo.net*

M.D.



SIGNAL FAILURES

Tram and blast

NINE months after the collapse of most of Gordon Brown's London Underground public-private partnership, another PFI transport deal is coming unstuck early. Tramtrack Croydon Ltd invested £75m in Croydon's tram system in the late 1990s, pocketed the operating profits and is now being bought out by Transport for London for £98m.

PFI concessions normally last 30 years, but TCL's was for a ludicrous 99 years. The government contributed £125m to building the tram system, yet minority investor TCL was allowed to call the shots. Within 10 years it was obvious the system would need expansion, but TCL refused to prepare for extra passengers. In 2006 TfL even went to court to try to force TCL to plan for growth, but the high court confirmed TCL didn't have to do anything not written into its original deal (*Eye* 1158). In other words, the system could stay in a 1996 time capsule until 2095.

TfL has been paying compensation, based on passenger numbers, to TCL to reflect each change made to London's transport fares since 1996. As more people rode the trams, taxpayers gave TCL more. By 2006-7 the annual compensation rate had reached £4m.

The PFI concession was so unsustainable TCL would have to be bought out sooner or later. It has failed taxpayers and passengers but the private firms behind TCL have profited (so Brown will presumably regard it as another PFI success).

MORE than three years after Alistair Darling announced the need to "consider" a new high-speed railway for Britain, Labour is still stalling on the subject.

Darling's successor, Transport Secretary Ruth Kelly, acknowledged last month that the rail network faces problems. So what's she doing about it? Er… "From next year, the detailed work will begin on options for addressing those challenges, and comparing those options in terms of costs and benefits." The options include "electrification or new lines between our major cities, whether conventional or high-speed".

Such investment would strengthen rail's competitive and environmental advantage over short-haul air travel; but has Kelly at last broken free of the air lobby? No. "As part of our cross-modal approach to planning, such rail projects will only be taken forward if they compare well with other transport options," she said.

There was no sign of a "cross-modal approach to planning" in November when Kelly launched a supposed "consultation" which in fact made clear the government's desire for a third runway and sixth terminal at Heathrow. For no comparison with other means of transport is allowed when aviation expansion is at stake. The 238-page document didn't even mention that London was now directly connected to France's high-speed rail system, nor that further new railways in Britain could enable Heathrow to cope with just two runways.

When transport consultants and mandarins do eventually get down to comparing rail with "other transport options", the massively expanded Heathrow will be a known future quantity – and the extra capacity for domestic flights will make it that much harder to justify big investment in rail expansion.

'Dr B Ching'

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£82m Value of Stagecoach shares transferred by founders Brian Souter and Ann Gloag to family trusts to beat changes in capital gains tax

£61m Approximate cost of four new Pendolino trains which Virgin Trains (half owned by Stagecoach) isn't buying for crowded west-coast mainline services

£3m Start-up subsidy Souter demanded for a hovercraft shuttle across the Forth, now on hold until taxpayers cough up

£500,000 Souter's pre-election donation to the SNP, which suddenly dropped its policy of regulating Stagecoach and other bus services

ECO WORRIER

Government spin cycle

THE government is keen to promote its seriousness about climate change, but Defra's efforts have left many bewildered.

Three years ago the then environment secretary Margaret Beckett launched, amid great fanfare, a new "Climate Change Communications Initiative". The fruit of a long (not to say expensive) consultation, its key theme was a catchy new strapline: "Tomorrow's Climate, Today's Challenge".

The plan was to promote this slogan to community groups all over Britain, as well as force other government agencies and departments to use it on relevant promotional materials. TV adverts were commissioned, leaflets and CDs printed and a new website designed. A £12m fund was even unveiled to dispatch grants to community organisations for climate change awareness projects. Alas, Mrs Beckett's successor, David Miliband, seemed less keen on the idea, which stalled within weeks of his arrival.

Meanwhile, with breathtaking irony, the Department for Transport (yes: the one that wants to expand Heathrow and build more roads) was dreaming up with its own green advertising campaign, "ActOn CO2". This seemed to resonate more with the public than the confusing "Tomorrow's Climate, Today's Challenge". So Defra's multi-million pound slogan has just been quietly binned.

Of course these aren't the only climate change campaigns paid for by taxpayers. The Carbon Trust, Energy Savings Trust, Environment Agency, Directgov, Natural England, and the Waste Resources Action Programme all have important things to say about global warming too. Millions of pounds have been spent on consultancies to promote their varying messages.

Now the latest incumbent at Defra, Hilary Benn, is threatening a crackdown on this wasteful and disjointed self-promotion. It seems all Defra agencies will soon be told that unless they use the "ActOn CO2" theme, they can say goodbye to future PR funding. Defra agencies are forever falling out with each other over budgets and remits. But expect little short of a bloodbath if the new secretary of state gets his way.

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

THALI TALE

MUCH anger in Oldham, where a councillor accused of raping a 16-year-old waitress in a tandoori restaurant appears to have every intention of staying on the council.

Within an hour of the start of Miss X's first shift at the Ayce Express restaurant in King Street last summer, she alleged, Asaf Ali – who was at the time a partner in the restaurant – forced himself upon her in his office. When the incident, which happened at 11.50 on the morning of 4 June, was reported to police, Ali, 37, at first denied everything and then changed his story and said the girl had consented to sex. The CPS eventually decided he would not face charges because there was insufficient chance of a successful prosecution.

Father-of-three Ali stepped down from the council's Labour group, but has continued to sit as an "independent" and remains a member of the Labour party and a school governor. He is no longer a partner in Ayce Express.

Lib Dem councillor Kay Knox formally asked the council's chief executive, Andrew Kilburn, for a report on where the council stood on the matter, and one was duly compiled by the acting director of the children, young people and families department. But Kilburn and legal chief Aileen Johnson have refused to reveal its contents.

As the *Eye* went to press Miss X's mother was intending to use public questions at the start of Oldham council's meeting of Wednesday 16 April to ask whether Ali is a "fit and proper person" to sit on the council and to demand his resignation. She told the *Oldham Chronicle*: "Legally he may not have committed a crime , but morally he had a duty of care to his employees."

It is, of course, open to the girl's family to report Ali to the Standards Board for England, but that singularly useless body would no doubt accept the infamous "Ken defence" that he wasn't engaged on council business at the time and therefore could not have "brought the council into disrepute".

UNLUCKY JIM

THERE was an air of inevitability about the fire which last week destroyed much of Margate's Scenic Railway, a grade II-listed wooden rollercoaster, once the centrepiece of Dreamland, a classic seaside amusement park which closed after 80 years in 2003.

The closure left 20 acres of seafront real estate practically deserted and ripe for development by its owner, Jimmy Godden. But the listed rollercoaster was in the middle of the site, and an independent government inspector's report in 2005 went against the supine local council and reiterated protection for it and the amusement park.

That year Godden formed the Margate Town Centre Regeneration Company with Reading-based developers Waterbridge, retaining a major stake in Dreamland. A public "consultation" by Thanet council two years later tried yet again to float the idea of a development, coming up with an unhappy 50-50 compromise of "heritage amusement park" and the usual flats and shops.

This is not the first time Godden has experienced misfortune with his seafront investments. In 1998 his Pleasurama fun park in Ramsgate burned down in the midst of a campaign to save it from redevelopment. Fortunately on that occasion Godden had the comfort of a substantial insurance payout to soften the blow. In 2003 his Mr G arcade on Margate seafront went up in flames, but again there was consolation in that the hole it left, nicknamed "Godden's Gap" by locals, provided the perfect access road from the seafront into the Dreamland site.

When English Heritage listed the rollercoaster in 2002 Godden described it as "great news" and told the BBC it was "safe in his hands". A year later he closed Dreamland, and now more than a quarter of this historic ride lies in ashes.

Inspector Knacker is treating the case as arson.

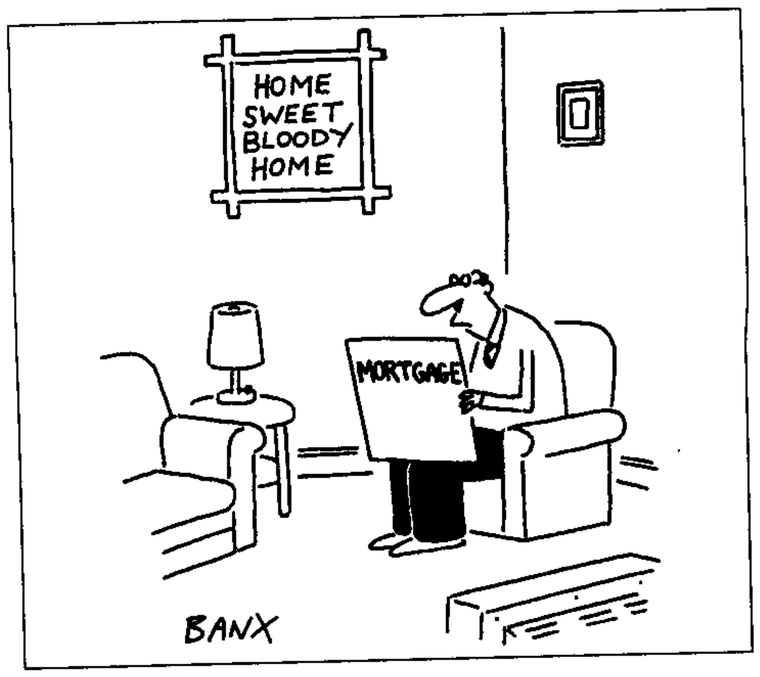
UGANDAN AFFAIRS

THE sociable nature of life on Aberdeen city council was revealed in *Eye* 1204 when we reported the reaction of the then-director of leisure services, Brian Woodcock, when he was discovered discussing Uganda in the office with a female colleague.

"When he turned round and saw me he offered me a cup of tea and a slice of cake," leisure centre manager Tom McNeil told an employment tribunal. A female colleague said she had interrupted Woodcock and the woman engaged in rumpy-pumpy on a separate occasion: "I could hear them moaning and groaning ... There is no doubt in my mind who was behind that screen or what they were doing." And as it was a bank holiday the couple were on double time. Phew!

After reporting what he'd seen, however, McNeil claimed he was forced out of his own job by the council's "bullying culture", headed by chief exec Douglas Paterson. The tribunal agreed that McNeil was unfairly constructively dismissed and awarded him £26,000. A piece of cake, really.

● ANOTHER unfairly dismissed council officer to emerge victorious from an employment tribunal earlier this month was Julie Jones, the former Swansea social services officer whose case featured in *Eye* 1196. The Cardiff tribunal heard how Jones was bullied by her manager, Alison White, but knew she would never get a fair hearing if she complained because of White's "inappropriate" relationship with former council leader Lawrence Bailey, who was subsequently banned from sitting as a councillor after some 80,000 porn images were found on his council computers (*Eye* 1200). White and Bailey denied having an affair. It emerged during the tribunal that some of the



images on Bailey's computer featured White, the woman he wasn't having an affair with and who had, in earlier evidence, denied being on his laptop. Just fancy that!

HEY DIDDLE-DIDDLE

THREE years after been fiddled out of £2.9m by a temporary member of staff for non-existent central heating systems (*Eye*s passim), the London borough of Lambeth is still wide open to fraud.

The Audit Commission has slated the council's housing department for inadequate accounting procedures after it discovered that the £56m the council is receiving over 10 years under the New Deal for Communities (NDC) to regenerate the Clapham Park estate is at risk of fraud.

The money has been rolling in since 2001 in lots of £5.6m a year to the Clapham Park Project, which was set up by the council to spearhead the campaign to persuade tenants to leave council control and have their estate run by an "arm's length management organisation" (Almo).

In 2006, the estate's management was transferred to Clapham Park Homes, a housing trust. However, as the commission makes clear, Lambeth remained responsible for ensuring that all NDC monies were spent lawfully.

According to the commission: "The authority does not operate appropriate monitoring systems or controls to enable it to fully discharge its minimum responsibilities as an accountable body." Business as usual, then!

BRUM COVE

DOUBLE standards in Birmingham, where two councillors have been suspended for the heinous crime of drawing attention to the neglect of a historic building by posting a video of it on YouTube.

The city council's standards committee determined that Lib Dems Martin Mullaney and Ernie Hendricks had "failed to show respect" to the former tram depot's owner, Safdar Zaman, by "trespassing" on his property and making the internet posting. The six-minute film showed how Zaman had carried out demolition work without planning permission and had made the building structurally unsound. Mullaney is appealing to our old friends the Standards Board for England (SBE), who will no doubt make a wise and sensible ruling.

Last month the SBE decreed that Brum's cabinet member for housing, Tory John Lines, had no case to answer after an intemperate magazine interview in which he characterized asylum-seekers as "scumbags". This had not, the SBE ruled, broken the councillors' code of conduct, which requires councillors to treat people with "respect".

Lines has form, respect-wise. In 2004 he was cautioned after assaulting a barman who refused to serve him after hours and in 1983 he was fined £200 after laying about a neighbour with a stick then grabbing him by the throat as he lay on the ground, following a row about a greenhouse. Perhaps it was this experience that inspired him in his current campaign as Brum's housing supremo to wage war on, er, "neighbours from hell".

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

WE APPRECIATE YOUR EFFORTS BUT WE FEEL YOU HAVE BEEN ALARMINGLY "OVERENTHUSIASTIC"...
BUT WE JUST WANTED TO DO OUR BIT FOR THE COMMUNITY...
NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH MEETING
I'M SORRY, GENTLEMEN, BUT CRACKING DOWN ON "EXCESSIVE USE OF STREET FURNITURE", "PAINTING THE FRONT OF ONE'S HOUSE WITHOUT DUE CONSIDERATION TO COLOUR SCHEME" AND "EMPLOYING LACE CURTAINS DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS" ARE NOT GOING TO MAKE ISLINGTON A SAFER PLACE

NOOKS and CORNERS

THE DERBY Playhouse, built in the 1970s, has a capacity of just 558; so it has long been argued that the city needs a larger theatre. And it could have had one.

As the Derby New Theatre Company pointed out, there was always the Hippodrome, a building with a handsome, 1,800-capacity auditorium ready and waiting to be turned back into a theatre.

The Hippodrome opened in 1914 as a 2,300-seat variety house. It was designed by Marshall & Tweedy of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. In 1930 it was converted into a 1,800 seat cinema. In 1950 it became a theatre again, but closed nine years later and in 1962 became a bingo hall. As such it survived in good condition; and in 1996, thanks to the Derby Civic Society, was listed grade II, partly because the interior plasterwork, the stage and its apparatus were untouched and intact.

The Hippodrome remained a bingo hall until last year when its owner, Walkers, closed it. Photographs confirm the auditorium was then still in good condition. Now comes the depressing bit.

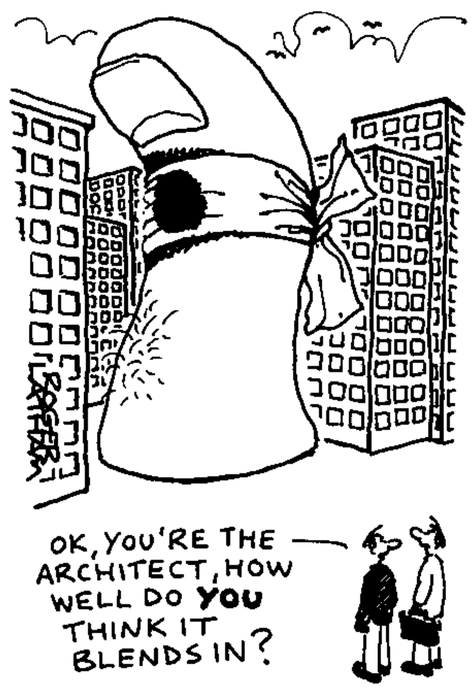
The Hippodrome was bought by Christopher Anthony, of Bijou Developments Ltd [*sic*], of London. Why he bought this large listed building, with no obvious use other than as a theatre, must be a matter for speculation. Mr Anthony has stated: "When purchasing this building it was not my intention to demolish it"; yet in January this year he notified Derby city council that he intended to apply for listed building consent to do precisely that. Council leader Chris Williamson (Lab) responded that the council could do nothing as "the ball is in his court". The following month a fire broke out under the stage behind the orchestra pit. This was soon extinguished and the only damage was caused to the interior by smoke. Yet, when a visitor managed to get inside early in March, he found that the decorative plasterwork of the auditorium had been systematically trashed and the front of the circle balcony had been removed.

Under pressure from the Civic Society and others, the council at last began to use its powers, serving an urgent repairs notice on Mr Anthony. Then, on 28 March without prior consultation with the council, heavy machinery arrived and began taking off the roof, which then collapsed, bringing down part of the side wall in Crompton Street. More of the wall was destroyed before work was stopped.

Mr Anthony claimed he had received advice from structural engineers "that the building should be demolished on safety grounds" (odd that he didn't discover this before he bought it). This is disputed by the council, which insists the Hippodrome is still capable of being renovated. What is clear is that a listed building which a year ago was in reasonable condition and could have been restored as the big theatre Derby needs, has now been wrecked and half demolished. But it will make a nice cleared site, of course.

The *Derby Evening Telegraph* has discovered that one of the earlier achievements of Bijou Developments was to buy a church in Grafton Square in London for conversion into flats and then rip out the interior so that when English Heritage inspectors arrived it was no longer worth listing, thwarting the hopes of the Clapham Society.

This sort of behaviour is no surprise and it is why we have legislation to protect historic and beautiful buildings. What deserves comment is the behaviour of Derby city council. Surely the moment it was bought, a close watch should have been kept on the Hippodrome – especially in view of the hopes to revive it. Empty listed buildings have a way of "going on fire", after all. Derby has been steadily eroded of its historic buildings over the last half-century; but does the council care?



THE Rt Hon. Margaret Hodge is Minister of State for Culture, Media 'n' Sport, with responsibility for Culture, Creative Industries and Tourism. Unfortunately her brief also includes historic buildings.

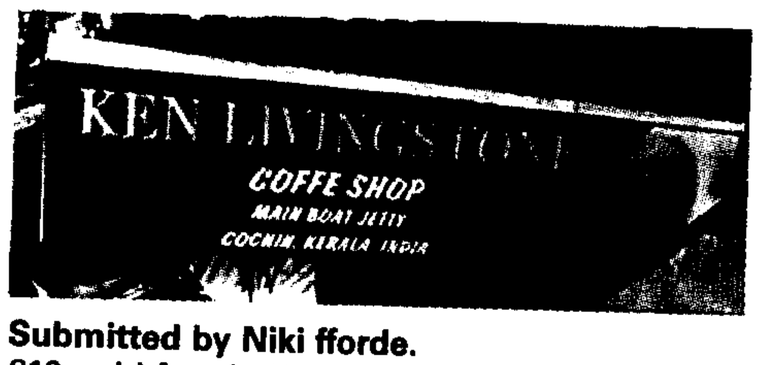
Recently she decided that the control tower at the former RAF Ibsley airfield in the New Forest "does not have sufficient architectural or historic interest, in a national context, to merit listing". This directly contradicted English Heritage's advice that the reinforced concrete structure was, in its precise design, "unique" and merited listing at grade II.

RAF Ibsley was used by the RAF and USAAF during the Second World War and was the setting for some of the filming of The First of the Few with Leslie Howard and David Niven in 1941. That, surely, should be enough to constitute "historic interest, in a national context" – especially in view of the popular interest in surviving wartime defence structures.

Mrs Hodge's arbitrary decision may reflect her dislike of modern buildings made of concrete. Going against the whole spirit and intention of listed building legislation, she recently announced that buildings less than 75 years old should be judged by different criteria and that, for many of them, as "this is the 21st century – a perfect digital image of the building, inside and out could be retained forever". But Mrs Hodge is out of step with public opinion in her tired old prejudices which she thinks will make her popular. And you thought things couldn't get any worse than when Tessa Jowell was Secretary of State for Culture...

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Cochin, India*



Submitted by Niki fforde.
£10 paid for similar submissions.
(SAE required for return of photographs)

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

WORKING at Arts Council England feels increasingly like being locked in a Groundhog Day of relentless repetition.

First there's the cock-up, then howls of protest from the arts world. Then the council sets up an "external review" into what went wrong. The review is carried out by someone with a botched record themselves, which means it won't be too damning; and allows it to drag on long enough for everyone to forget what the fuss was about. By the time it's finished, the council will have had another mishap, caused another round of protest, announced another review, and so on.

Hence the appointment of Baroness Mackintosh to review what went wrong at Christmas when the council slashed 185 organisations, including a couple of our best-known chamber orchestras, from its client list. As Genista Mackintosh her time as general director of the Royal Opera House was the shortest ever (she resigned after five months). But this didn't stop her elevation to the peerage; and it was Baroness Mackintosh who chaired the review into ACE mismanagement back in 2005.

What makes her return so welcome is that it takes the heat off ACE officials. And as they've set no time limit on her review, they appear to be conserving their strength to deal with the next disaster, which at the moment is Question 22 of ACE's grant application form. This asks funding applicants to state the sexual orientation of their board members: an outrageous impertinence that deserves the flak it's attracted. How the council could be so stupid defies belief. But what ACE lacks in common sense it makes up for in entertainment value: and the joy of the past week has been to watch its pathetic efforts to wriggle out of this new mess.

Question 22 is "not compulsory", said ACE in desperation. But the form states otherwise. Q22 was asked merely for "governmental purposes", said ACE. But the Department for Culcha came forward like a shot to say it has no governmental purpose whatever. In other words, ACE is in the shit alone.

How long before another useless "external review" of application-form procedures?

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

How Someone once so brash, controversial and publicity-seeking...
DAVID HOCKNEY GIVES 40FT PAINTING TO TATE
"BIGGER TREES NEAR WARD
Could now be a modest elder statesman, producing huge, universally loved, naturalistic landscapes!
It's very sad.
Tragic!
DAVID H
40FT PA

LUVVIES

Near the end of the run [of Macbeth at the Old Vic], Blessed found O'Toole in his dressing room, "on his knees, screaming like a banshee, destroyed in heart and soul. I said, 'F*** it Peter!' – the audience were only coming to see him suffer. But he said, 'No – I'll go on.' He completed it and completed the run. I have never – never! – seen courage like that. My dad, who once saved 300 lives down the pit, said he knew of no one who had the courage O'Toole displayed that evening."

BRIAN BLESSED, ***The Times***

Submitted by Elaine Darkin.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Letters

Poetry in Motion

Sir,

I was dismayed to read in last week's Eye a quote from Michael Stewart, co-organizer of the Huddersfield Literary festival, referring to Andrew Motion's appearance last year as "a waste of money," and saying that he had been "bored to tears".

As one of the festival patrons, I have to say that no-one else at the Huddersfield Festival appears to share this opinion. I was at the same event, and everyone (apart from Mr Stewart, it seems) found it thoroughly entertaining and worthwhile.

Still, you know what they say. Opinions are like arseholes. Everybody's got one.

JOANNE HARRIS (author of "Chocolat"),

Via email.

Lookalike

Spector

Struwwelpeter

Sir,

Could someone look into the age of Phil Spector – could he have modelled for the Struwwelpeter character?

Regards,
SIMON THOMPSON,

Via email.

Kidney stones

Sir,

In Eye 1207, p. 29, I read about the dismaying case of Paul Steane. Without detracting either from Paul's suffering or from whatever wrongs the NHS did him, the figure you give for creatinine may worry kidney sufferers unduly.

You say, "Paul's... creatine... had risen alarmingly from 127 to 200, well above normal – a clear indicator of kidney failure."

Was the true figure 500, 600 or so? I have a jiggered kidney, from taking lithium. My level is monitored around 180 and went once in late 2007 to 200. No alarm bells, no hospitalisation, no consultant saying, "You'd better have a last loving word with him."

*The consultant physician I see told me that the levels for considering dialysis are **far** higher than mine, and the level indicating kidney transplant is higher still, in the order of hundreds more again.*

Perhaps you would print a correction, after having a word with MD? If he doesn't know, he can ask around. Or is he she?

My complaint gives me nephrogenic diabetes insipidus. But there's no hypo- or hyperglycaemia with this. I take a couple of chlortalidone tablets at breakfast and notice no symptoms. I walk the fields, go about 40 times p.a. to a gym – I'm 76 – and stay upright thanks to handfuls of NHS drugs. I hope to pay at least ten more subs to the Eye.

Mary, 80+ and coiffed, came to the gym too. "Why do you do it, Mary?" we cried when we had our breath back. Quick as a falling dumb-bell she said: "To get worse more slowly."

Have you a network of MPs who would raise questions from "In The Back"? Or is Parliament too cowed? You have uncovered a mountain of the most rancid shit.

Long live the Eye!
ROGER MONTAGUE,

Taunton.

An old lag writes...

Sir,

As an enthusiastic reader of your publication despite my current circumstances, I would like to answer your question on "who was James Chuter Ede?"

If my memory serves me correctly, wasn't he the Home Secretary under Atlee in the 1940s?

Thank you for helping to brighten my days whilst at "Her Majesty's Pleasure". Many a time the flap on my door is opened by officers wondering why I am laughing. I have to assure them that I am taking my incarceration seriously! The "Letter From The Supreme Leader" page is a work of brilliance.

Regards,
IAN BRIGGS,

HMP, Birmingham.

Square Basher bashed

Sir,

As a serving member of Her Majesty's (note not the Supreme Leader's) Armed Forces, I feel obliged to pass comment on Square Basher's latest tirade.

I have been involved in the RAF's much maligned Air Transport operations for some time and have yet to see groups of squaddies "stripping off their dessies... on the tarmac.", as he so blithely comments, at RAF Brize Norton or any other airfield; indeed I am aware of only one such occurence reported at Birmingham Airport last year. Brize Norton does not have a "no uniform policy", indeed on my own return from sunnier climes two years ago I took great pleasure in undertaking the two-hour drive home in my desert camouflage uniform as have many of my colleagues.

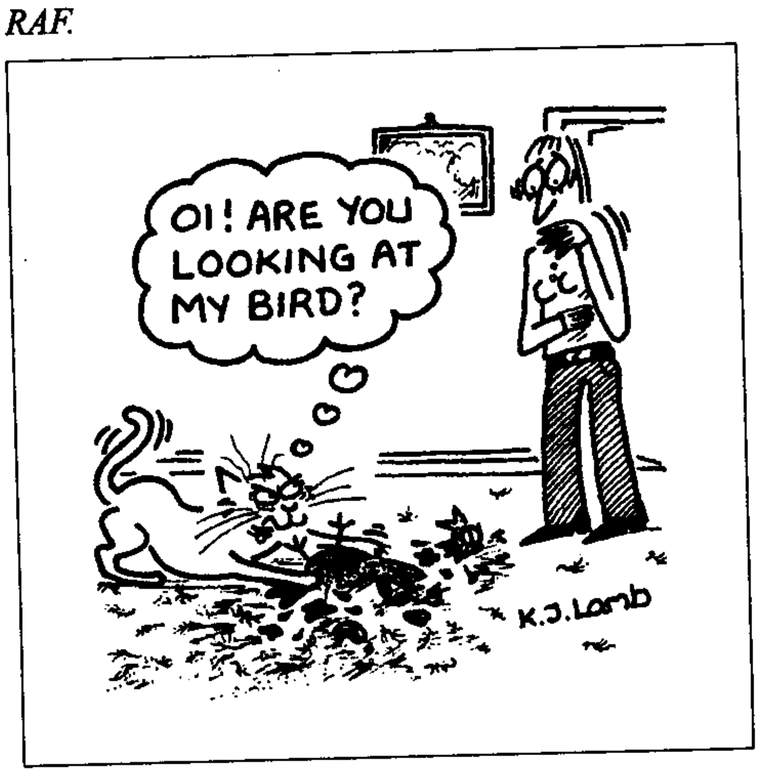
If the decision has been made to change into "civvy" clothing it will have been made by the returning unit's commander because it is widely accepted that coach loads of squaddies clad in desert clothing may make for a rather juicy target for terrorists, disaffected members of the public, journalists, labour politicians etc. Furthermore no ban on wearing uniform has ever been instigated "for fear of upsetting civilians", but has always been undertaken to protect service personnel themselves as was the case during the IRA's period of activity on the mainland

Furthermore on most flights other than those to Iraq or Afghanistan it is accepted practice to travel in civilian clothing in case the aircraft has to divert to an airfield in another country. Personally I encourage my personnel to venture out in public in uniform to remind our fellow countryman that, despite Labour's best efforts, we do still have Armed Forces. These ill-informed, reactionary comments are an unfortunate blot on Square Basher's otherwise excellent record of service.

For security reasons, I would appreciate it if my name were not mentioned in case of publication of this e-mail.

Yours,
A FLIGHT LIEUTENANT,

RAF.



Scenes You Seldom See

"When I put on black lace knickers, a suspender belt and silk stockings, it really turns my husband off""

Wrong diagnosis

Sir,

MD repeats the old political dogma of "those who don't already jump the queue for a private room..." (Eye 1207)

There are no queues for private treatment, that's why people opt for it, and they haven't joined the NHS queue so they can't be jumping it. In fact they're shortening it.

Any politician with the genuine interests of patients and the NHS at heart would be encouraging private treatment, not trying to maintain a discredited, overloaded, inefficient, state monopoly at all costs.

Yours,
RICHARD HOOK,

Blackpool.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

The unexpected transformation of Italian Carla Bruni, from scantily clad model to elegant consort of the older Monsieur Sarkozy, has been hailed an international triumph. As an inspiration to older men everywhere, do you by chance, have any other revealing photos of similar couples of mixed race in the early stages of their relationship?

Regards,
LYNNE BOOTH,

Bristol.

Write and wrong

Sir,

Further to Don Hill's interesting letter about Members of Parliament having the right to send letters free when postal services started in the sixteenth century, this privilege lasted well into the nineteenth century. It is mentioned in Chapter II of Jane Austen's Mansfield Park.

The heroine's uncle, owner of Mansfield Park and an MP, enables her to write home to the brother she has left behind by "franking" (ie signing) her letters home.

MICHAEL GROSVENOR MYER,

Cambridge.

Olympian folly?

Sir,

What's all this current twaddle about the 'Olympic Spirit'? The original Olympics were as much about honour and integrity as Michaelangelo's 'David' was about the biblical son of Jesse, in that they were merely an opportunity for young male flesh to show off before other young male flesh, and , especially when wrestling was added to running, nothing mattered but winning.

A. DAHN,

Bangor.

No Fleisch on him...

Sir,

Re Stephen Bayley's letter (Eye 1207): Hitler's long-time friend Ernst 'Putzi' Hanfstaengl reports in his memoir Fifteen Years with Hitler *that Hitler gave up meat and alcohol after leaving the Landsberg prison to try to lose weight, and subsequently became obsessively convinced that they were bad for him. E.G. Schenck's "medical biography"* Patient Hitler *(1989) has a long section (pp. 27-42) on Hitler's vegetarianism and his motivation for it.*

One impeccable witness to Hitler's vegetarianism, at any rate at the end of his life, is Traudl Junge, who was one of Hitler's secretaries from the end of 1942 until his suicide in April 1945 In her memoir Until the final hour (Bis zur letzten Stunde), *first published in 2002, she refers to Hitler's vegetarianism on numerous occasions, as well as to his frequent criticisms of the bad effects of eating meat, as to those of smoking, although he did not stop other people eating meat in the way he refused to have people smoke in his presence (until just before the end), much as he did not stop people drinking although (almost) abstemious himself. He would, however, from time to time graphically describe the goings-on in an abattoir to try to put people off eating meat.*

As for his personal chef, the first one Junge mentions was nicknamed "Crumbs" (Krümel) who cooked for everyone at Rastenburg and who was not very tolerant of Hitler's preferences, so that the Führer usually just got to eat the side dishes without the meat, as she puts it. Sometimes Crumbs would put meat in soups and stews, and Hitler would usually (she says) tell the difference and claim that the meat made him ill. In the end Hitler ended up eating gruel, mashed potatoes, vegetables, and not much else, and Junge was surprised by how little he complained.

CATHERINE ATHERTON,
Los Angeles.

Me and my spoonerisms

Sir,

Could the correspondent (Letters, 1206) signing herself Mary Hinge be the same dear Mary who used to perform a delightful, if risqué, act on or about Llandudno Pier in the early '60s. Her partner at that time was Betty Swallocks and their act centred around an unusual dance involving a ferret and some ping-pong balls.

OGGY BACH,
Via email.

To Coyne a phrase

Sir,

I read and re-read the 'Just Fancy That' on page 13 of issue 1207, trying to find out what was so funny. I seem not to be up to the task, as the two passages, one in English and one in Ulster Scots, appear to be identical in meaning.I'm not an expert in Ulster Scots, so perhaps there's a real howler in there that I'm not spotting. I wonder if you could enlighten us as to what it is we should be laughing at. Unless it's just that you think that people who speak differently from you are inherently funny. We know a word for that, don't we. Please advise.

PAUL COYNE,
Glasgow.

Spot the balls-up

Sir,

With reference to your piece on page 5 (Eye 1207) about the Supreme Leader's (camera shy) photo opportunity at Arsenal's football ground. You ask readers to "Imagine how Blair would have played it – kicking the ball into the net and raising a fist of triumph". Alas, no such mental imagery is required, as memory will serve just as well.

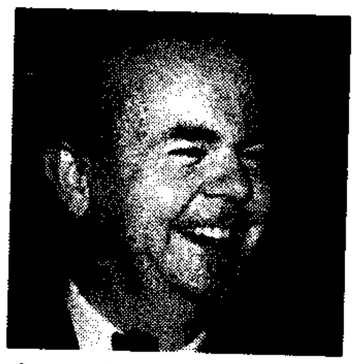
I'm sure we all recall (apart from the Eye) Tony Blair's cringeworthy photo opportunity with Kevin Keegan in the mid-nineties. Blair, whilst standing a few yards from the goal face, was passed the ball which he promptly hoofed over the bar (almost out for a corner, as the joke goes).

Maybe Brown wished to reserve his dribbling for Sarkozy's wife.

ZIA UL-HAQUE,
Via email.

Lookalike

Editor



Grim Reaper

Sir,

Couldn't help but notice the similarities between the lead singer of heavy metal band Grim Reaper, and the legendary Ian Hislop.

What do you think?

DAN HAYES,
Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"... only 11 percent of female clinical academics are women..."
JANE DACRE, Radio 4
(philbo)

"Gary Neville was captain, and now Ryan Giggs has taken on the mantelpiece."
RIO FERDINAND, Radio 5 Live
(James H. Reeve)

"Her biggest scalp since she gave birth in June last year..."
Eurosport
(Claire Blair)

"... no, it's so invisible you can't see it..."
KATIE PRICE, ITV
(Stephen Hammond)

"Because the Bishop of Harare would not condemn homosexuals he is facing rearguard action."
PETER BYLES, Radio 4
(Don Salter)

Retro chic

Sir,

In defence of Lord Gnome's green credentials (Letters, Eye 1206), Cameron Kerr's UK subscription copy of Lord Gnome's organ might arrive wrapped in wicked plastic but my overseas airmail copy still arrives in a low quality, possibly even recycled, brown paper envelope suggesting one that decades ago would have contained naughty pictures of Christine Keeler or perhaps fivers handed over in El Vino to some underworld source. Please don't change this – not only does it have a charming retro feel but it has got my subscription copy safely to me in certain countries where unmasking any politician or ruler lands you in gaol, or where mail order catalogues are censored.

Yours,
ADRIAN BARON,
St. Vincent, West Indies.

P'edants Corner

... 1) Arthur C Clarke was born on 16th December 1917, not 1918 as in your cartoon (Eye 1207) – the advanced alien civilization that presumably built his monolithic headstone would surely get this right.

2) Brian Tillot, in his letter on The Passion drama (1207), doubts that Jacobean English would be any closer in idiom to 1st century Latin or Hebrew than would modern 'debased' English. Alas, Hebrew was not spoken in 1st century Palestine, it was by then purely the language of (already) ancient religious texts and rituals, much like Latin and King James Biblical English are today. The everyday language of 1st century Palestine was Aramaic; in Mr Tillot's idiom this was, at best, a rather "debased" form of Hebrew.

DENIS COLLINS.

... "Drake's Boyhood Revisited" (Eye 1207)? Sir Walter Raleigh and John Everett Millais, who painted "The Boyhood of Raleigh" must be spinning... if I had a subscription, I'd cancel it.

SIMON LAMONT.

Redway's Boyhood (revisited)

... Please could you inform The Zapper (EyeTV, 1207) that there was never a "Droopy the Dog"; he was always "Droopy the Poodle", despite looking nothing like one.

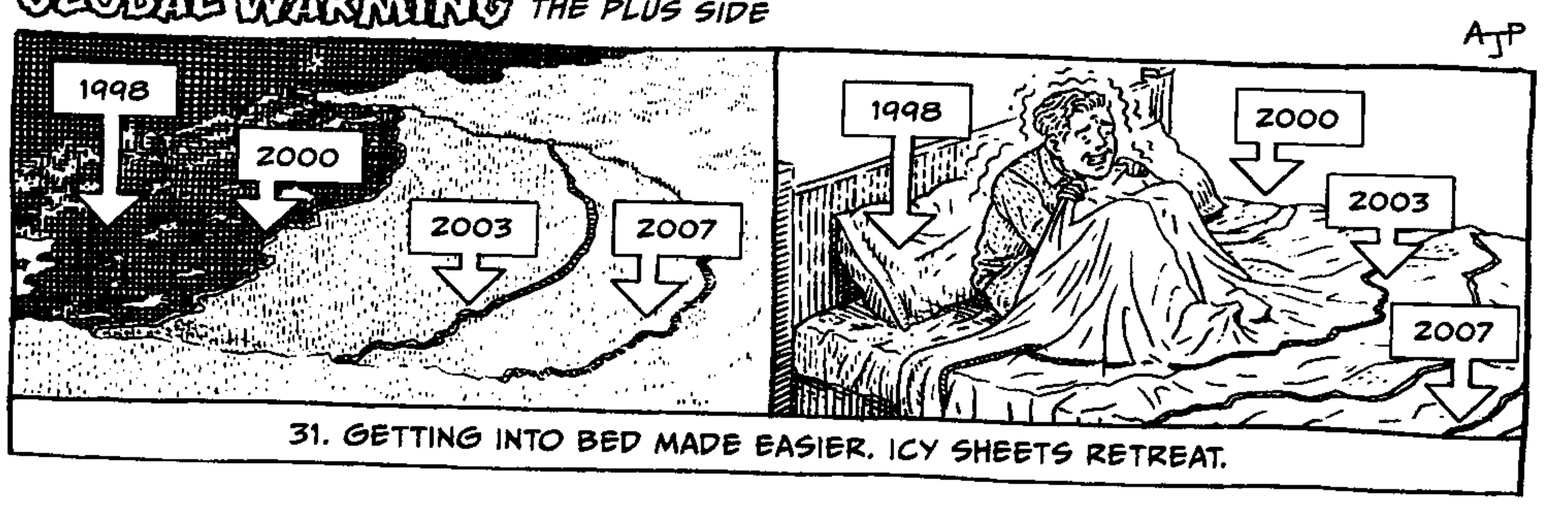
PHIL POPE.

... The "23 professional bodies involved in the construction of Terminal 5" (Quotes of the Week, Eye 1207) claim that T5 is "the largest freestanding building in Britain". They can't even get that little bit right... Hadrian's Wall, even in its dilapidated state, is the largest freestanding building in Britain.

ALASDAIR DRYSDALE.

... The pub regular at the back of the Broons Budget cartoon, Eye 1206, could not have siphoned the hand-pulled beer as he was higher than the barrel in the cellar.

PAUL SANDERSON.



Letter from **Kathmandu**
from Our Own Correspondent

ABOUT 70 million years ago, the land-masses of India and China collided, creating the Himalayas as debris. Alas, for we who live upon them, sandwiched between two thrusting giants, geo-political debris is often what we feel like.

Throughout our histories, in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and elsewhere we have been forced to seek an accommodation with one great rival or the other. It's a delicate business. Openly defy a great power, and you risk being swallowed up by it. That was Tibet's fate in 1950. But yielding too easily carries a similar risk. Thus poor Sikkim. Having agreed to become an Indian protectorate, it was gobbled up by India in 1975.

Our rulers have not helped. By failing to modernise, they have paved the way for a pious intervention. Tibet is the prime example. The medieval punishments meted out by its ruling lamas – including amputating noses and ears – will be cited forever by the Chinese to justify their occupation. No matter if Tibetans would rather be ruled badly by their own people, than well from abroad.

Some of us learned from the Tibetans' downfall – and none better than Bhutan, a patch of lofty mountains and lovely forest, to the east of us here in Nepal. Until 1960, in the grip of its king and Buddhist clergy, Bhutan was closed to the world. It was a feudal society and barter economy. Trading salt for gold with the Tibetans was the extent of its foreign trade.

But China's invasion of Tibet and sealing of the border helped sparked a process of careful reform that has made Bhutan perhaps the happiest place in the Himalayas. Last month the kingdom held its first real election. Its economy has been growing at 7 percent for the past 25 years, mainly on the back of sales of hydro-power to India. And the government has spent its revenues well. Most Bhutanese receive free healthcare and education. Their heritage and environment are also unusually well-protected. The long-serving former king, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, committed himself to the pursuit of "Gross Domestic Happiness" and he didn't do badly.

Not so here in Nepal. While our Bhutanese cousins are the richest South Asians, we are the poorest. After a decade-long civil war, sparked by a Maoist insurgency, our bit of the Himalayas is broken and lawless. Ethnic separatists are sprouting in the east and south. Like Bhutan, we too have just held an election, on 10 April, but ours was a violent, messy and twice-postponed affair.

We like to blame the neighbours – especially India, our biggest trade partner – for our troubles. But our misfortunes are really our own doing and reflect our failure to decide if we want to be an absolute, constitutional or former monarchy. In recent years we've tried all three.

If one man is to blame for the mess, it is our king, the unwise Gyanendra. He was gifted the job in 2001 after the then crown prince, Gyanendra's nephew, massacred his father, King Birendra, and several other royals. Yet Gyanendra did not view his succession as a tragic accident; rather as his divine right. Instead of seeking peace with the Maoists, he escalated the war and in 2005 seized absolute power.

He was forced, by a wave of protests, to hand it back the following year. And at the end of last year our interim rulers, a coalition of Maoists and opposition politicians, agreed to scrap the monarchy altogether. Thus the first act of the newly-elected assembly will be to declare Nepal a republic. Many of us consider this a shame: our kings held an important place in our Hindu traditions. But if to be a republic is the price for getting rid of Gyanendra (and his odious offspring) then… off with their heads!

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "God be praised, I am not a cheat or a con man," a Yemeni dealer in precious stones known as Q.M. told a court in Dubai, "and in God's name I am willing to prove it. The onyx stone which I offered for sale on my stall at Global Village really will make the wearer bullet-proof, just as I claimed. As God is my witness, I asked the police to test my claim by shooting me while I was wearing it, but instead they confiscated it, closed down my stall and arrested me. I say now to this court: The Lord knows I am ready to put on the onyx stone and be shot, and to serve a life term in prison if the trial fails. I am an innocent man, God help me." However, the Dubai Court of Misdemeanour was unimpressed by Q.M.'s claims, and sentenced him to six months in jail, followed by deportation. "He attempted to swindle people," the Public Prosecutor alleged, "by placing a newspaper advertisement, offering the bullet-proof onyx stone for Dh 1.8 billion. Tests conducted by court experts suggest that it does not confer magical powers on its wearer, and we are not willing to accept the defendant's challenge by shooting him, because it would then be impossible to punish him with the term of imprisonment he so richly deserves." *(Gulf News, 12/2/08 and 4/3/08. Spotter: Paul Wood)*

– ● –

● *"Durex wants to ensure that its condoms are best meeting the needs of Indians," R. Srinivasan of TTK-LIG (who market the Durex brand in India) told a press conference in New Delhi, "and what better way to know this than to ask them at first hand? If you are over 18, male, and wish to combine business with pleasure, then the post of condom tester may be the job for you. We are currently planning to recruit 1,000 men to test our products, so why not sign up for what is probably the best job on earth?*
"In 2007, a study by the Indian Council of Medical Research concluded that international condom sizes are too large for most Indian men. So Durex have responded by manufacturing a new range of "snug fit" condoms, and it's these that we are asking Indian men to test. Durex received a tremendous response when it staged similar campaigns in Malaysia, and it's not just pleasure that is on offer. In return for providing us with detailed feedback about product performance, all volunteers will receive sweeties, gift vouchers and iPods. Furthermore, one lucky employee will win an all-expenses paid holiday for two at a romantic getaway in Poona." (New India Press, 13/2/08. Spotter: Roger Welsby)

– ● –

● "China has long been a world leader in weather modification," Wang Jianjie of the Beijing Meteorological Bureau told reporters in the city's new Olympic stadium, "but until now we have concentrated on creating rain, rather than preventing it. However, it is vital that nothing should spoil the 2008 Olympics, so we have spent two years perfecting a technique that reduces the actual size of raindrops, delaying rain until the clouds have moved on. Our tests have been successful, and our preparations are now complete. We guarantee there will be no rain during the opening ceremony of the Olympics on August 8th."

China has been experimenting with weather modification since the 1950s, when it began seeding clouds with silver iodide to trigger

downpours in the country's northern deserts. "We plan to create a meteorological umbrella over the stadium," explained weather engineer Wang Yubin, "but it's a complex process, selecting the precise time and place to fire rockets filled with silver iodide into the clouds. Probably we will have to decide on the day before the opening, or even on the day itself."

However, some experts remain unconvinced about the prospects of success. "If you're talking about a shower, then you can eliminate it," said Wang Guohe of the Chinese Academy of Meteorology. "But if it's raining cats and dogs on the day, there's nothing man can do about it." *(Los Angeles Times, 31/1/08, and China Daily, 26/4/07. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 19

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades!

No finer tribute has been paid to me since I assumed the leadership of the nation than the decision of the Chinese People's Republic to present me with the Olympic torch in a special ceremony at my London headquarters.

They particularly wished that the flame should be brought to our capital city to honour the man whom they recognise as the most outstanding leader on the world stage today.

Imagine my feelings, Comrades, as I stood in Downing Street, holding in my hands this sacred symbol of world peace and comradeship.

We were particularly grateful to the People's Republic for providing an escort of highly-trained "Guards of the Flame", clad in their handsome blue-and-white bullet-proof tracksuits, to ensure the safe passage of the torch through our London streets.

It was symbolic of the internationalist Olympic spirit that the Chinese "men in blue" should join together with our own "men in blue" to preserve law and order by keeping our city free from dissidents, troublemakers and other enemies of the state.

The whole day was a triumph for the new spirit of co-operation between the British people and our Chinese Comrades.

Let me now turn to the confusion which has arisen in some circles about my own visit to Beijing this summer.

As I made clear last month to the French President, Comrade Sarkozy, I regarded it as of the highest importance that I should be present at the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.

Many people took this to mean that I would be present at the ceremony. But if they examine my words carefully, they will realise that I never had the slightest intention of being present on this occasion.

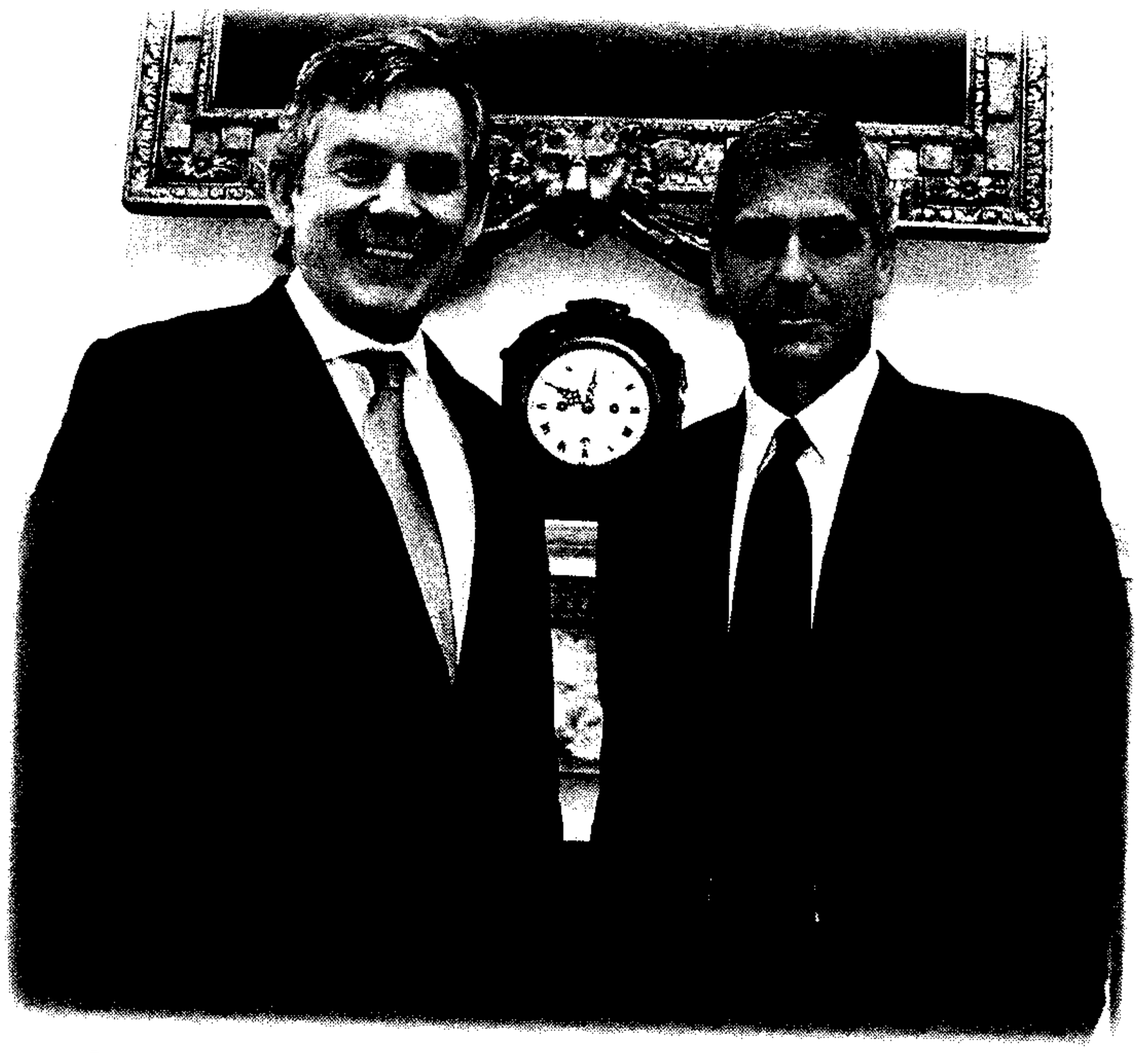
Not only would it be impolite to our Chinese friends for Britain's head of state to upstage President [fill in the name, please] but, at a time when we are all doing all we can to combat global warming, it would be unforgiveable for me to be extending my carbon footprint by flying all the way to Beijing for what is no more than the opening ceremony of a sporting event.

I shall of course be flying out to attend the closing ceremony, when the historic torch will be passed on to myself as host to the next Olympic Games in 2012.

When that day comes, we of course look forward to the entire world flying into London to watch myself, supported by Mayor Leninspart, opening what will be the greatest sporting occasion the world has ever seen.

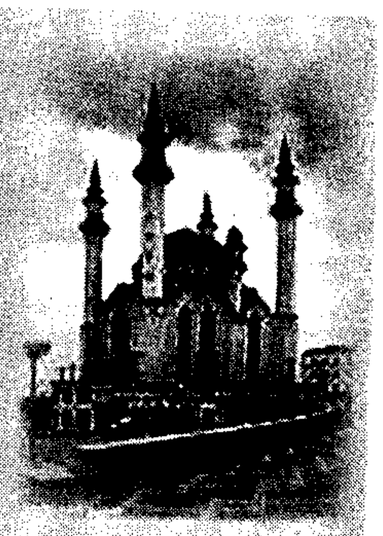
The Supreme Leader

Gordon Brown



Our great Leader reassures president George W. Clooney that, unlike the hated Blair, he won't use this photograph for propaganda purposes

HOUSE PRICES
Forward to Prosperity



Let me reassure all comrades that there is no cause for alarm. The situation is containable, so long as we take no action. I am making strenuous efforts to ensure that houses contrive to remain unaffordable by ensuring that the banks are unwilling to advance the necessary funds. I hope that this will reassure both house-owners and first-time buyers who will thereby be spared the problems caused by negative equity.

A Directive To All Members Of The Politburo From The Supreme Leader

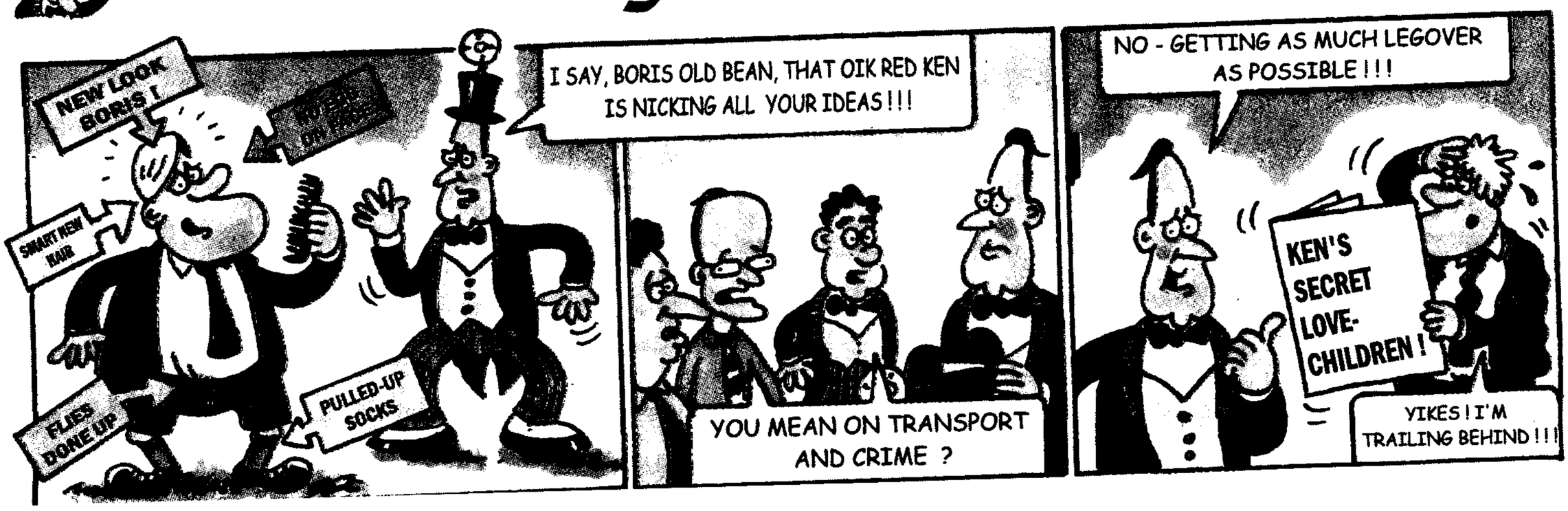
I am informed that there have recently been wholly uncalled-for disagreements between senior members of the Politburo, over a wide range of matters. In one instance, it appears that blows were exchanged between Comrade Balls and Comrade Straw.

Such incidents recall the worst excesses of the age of Blairism, when it became commonplace for senior ministers to exchange insults and to direct personal attacks at the discredited former leader himself.

In view of the provocation given by the former leader, surrounded as he was by the fawning lackeys of the Campbellite-Mandelsonian claque, such disloyalty may have been entirely understandable and indeed praiseworthy.

However, in the Age of Change, different standards prevail. If I learn of any further instances of such irresponsible conduct, I will have no hesitation in calling on the services of our Chinese "comrades in blue" to take appropriate corrective action. G.B.

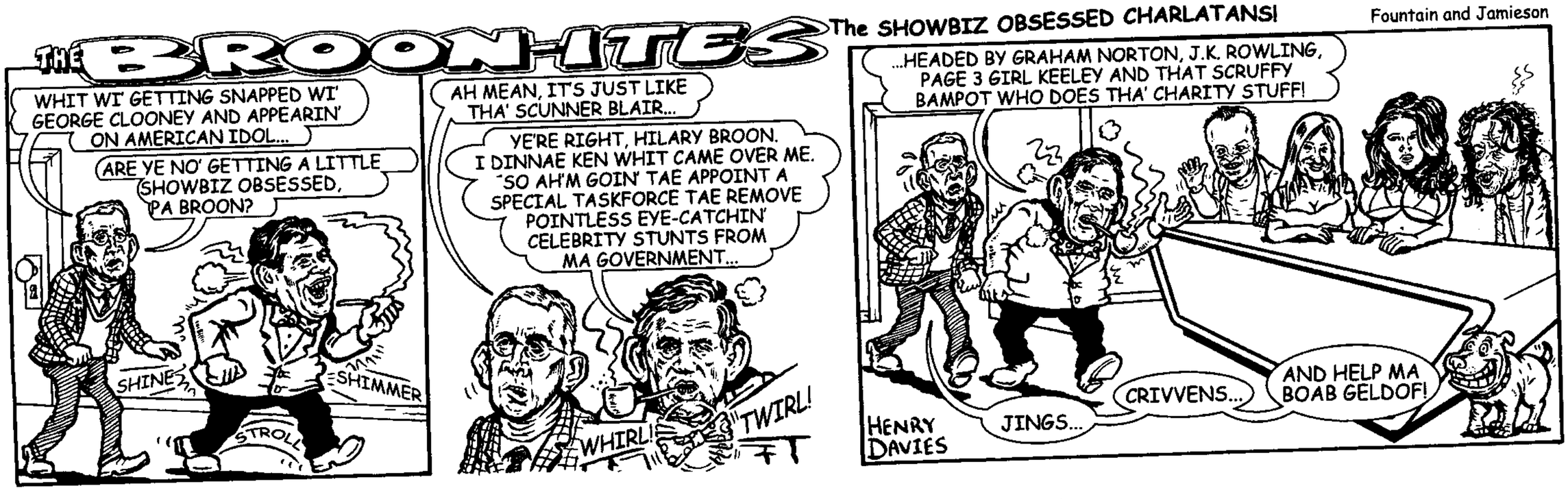
Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


NEW LOOK BORIS !
SMART NEW HAIR
FLIES DONE UP
PULLED-UP SOCKS
I SAY, BORIS OLD BEAN, THAT OIK RED KEN IS NICKING ALL YOUR IDEAS !!!
YOU MEAN ON TRANSPORT AND CRIME ?
NO - GETTING AS MUCH LEGOVER AS POSSIBLE !!!
KEN'S SECRET LOVE-CHILDREN !
YIKES ! I'M TRAILING BEHIND !!!

THE BROON-ITES

The SHOWBIZ OBSESSED CHARLATANS!

Fountain and Jamieson

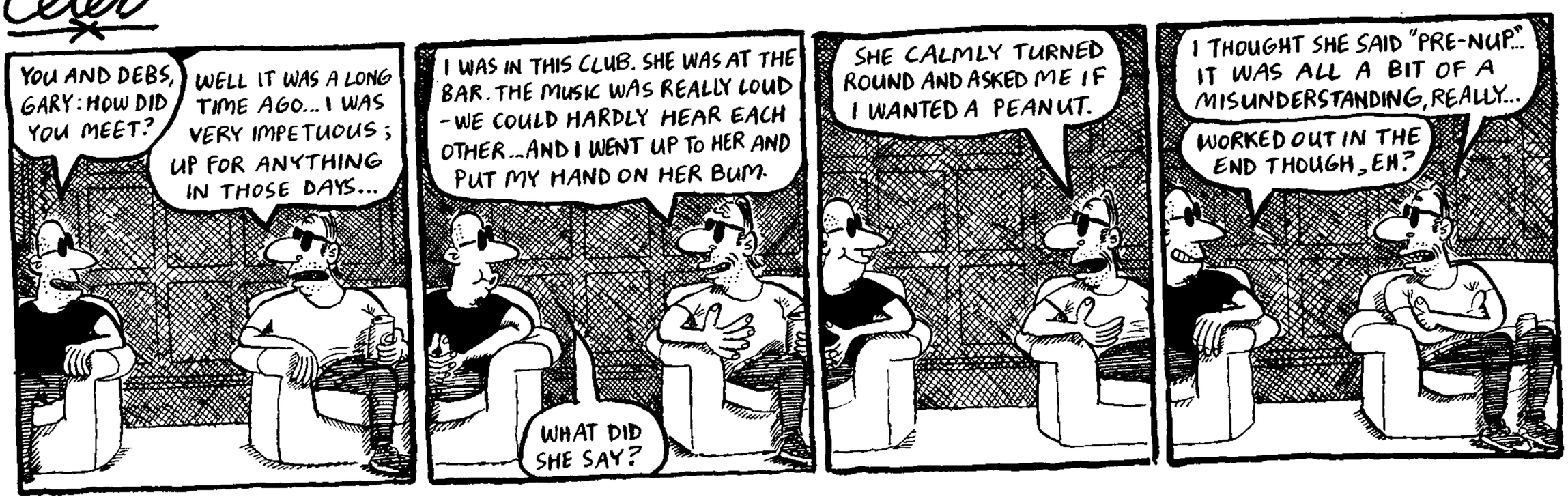

WHIT WI' GETTING SNAPPED WI' GEORGE CLOONEY AND APPEARIN' ON AMERICAN IDOL...
ARE YE NO' GETTING A LITTLE SHOWBIZ OBSESSED, PA BROON?
SHINE
SHIMMER
STROLL
AH MEAN, IT'S JUST LIKE THA' SCUNNER BLAIR...
YE'RE RIGHT, HILARY BROON. I DINNAE KEN WHIT CAME OVER ME. SO AH'M GOIN' TAE APPOINT A SPECIAL TASKFORCE TAE REMOVE POINTLESS EYE-CATCHIN' CELEBRITY STUNTS FROM MA GOVERNMENT...
WHIRL!
TWIRL!
...HEADED BY GRAHAM NORTON, J.K. ROWLING, PAGE 3 GIRL KEELEY AND THAT SCRUFFY BAMPOT WHO DOES THA' CHARITY STUFF!
JINGS...
CRIVVENS...
AND HELP MA BOAB GELDOF!
HENRY DAVIES

ABOUT THE CLINTSTONES - THE PREHISTORIC FIRST FAMILY

Hey Clintstones - where d'you get all that money?
Accounts
$109m
Expenses: Dry Cleaning Cigars etc...
I earn a lot from public speaking.
Say, that's an idea honeybun - when you lose, you can earn big bucks...
...from public misspeaking!
YABBADABBADOUGH!

LIGGER

Celeb


YOU AND DEBS, GARY: HOW DID YOU MEET?
WELL IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO... I WAS VERY IMPETUOUS; UP FOR ANYTHING IN THOSE DAYS...
I WAS IN THIS CLUB. SHE WAS AT THE BAR. THE MUSIC WAS REALLY LOUD - WE COULD HARDLY HEAR EACH OTHER... AND I WENT UP TO HER AND PUT MY HAND ON HER BUM.
WHAT DID SHE SAY?
SHE CALMLY TURNED ROUND AND ASKED ME IF I WANTED A PEANUT.
I THOUGHT SHE SAID "PRE-NUP"... IT WAS ALL A BIT OF A MISUNDERSTANDING, REALLY...
WORKED OUT IN THE END THOUGH, EH?

SOLDIERS WIN RIGHT TO SUE WHEN KILLED

by Our Legal Staff **Joshua Rosenbeard**

IN A shock ruling today in the High Court, Mr Justice Cocklecarrot decreed that under the Human Rights Act all soldiers on active service have a "right to life".

Said Cocklecarrot, "It follows that if Soldier A, for example, should find himself in a terminal situation on, let us say, the road to Baghdad, he should be entitled to sue the Government for compensation."

The ruling has been welcomed by servicemen. Speaking from Basra airport, a typical tommy, who declined to give his name under the Data Protection Act, said, "it is good to know that we have the protection of the law. We do not join the Army to be shot at by the enemy."

On Other pages

● Lawyers welcome new ruling. Huge fees expected.

News In Brief

MAJOR PLOT FOILED

ANTI-TERROR police say a major plot that could have led to a three year old getting into their first choice of primary school has been foiled after the arrest yesterday of three lollipop ladies.

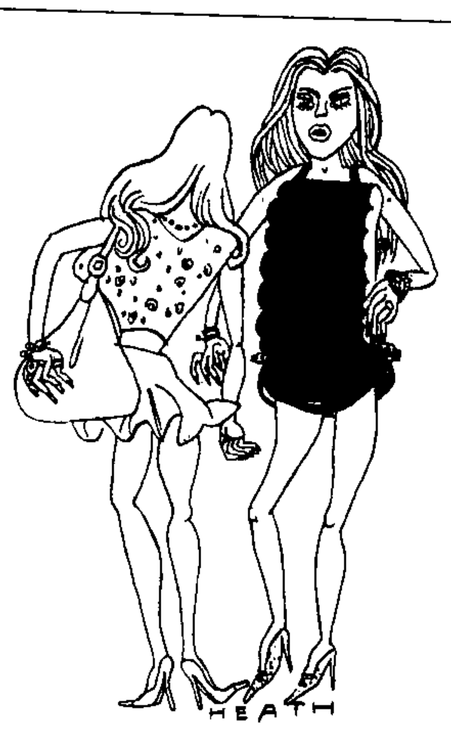
"In a series of coordinated dawn raids we recovered a number of sickening videos featuring 'The Wiggles', 'Postman Pat' and 'Barney the Dinosaur' as well as sophisticated knitting equipment that could have been used to make school uniforms," said a delighted Chief Inspector.

OLYMPIC UPDATE

DOWNING Street has strenuously denied suggestions that Gordon Brown has snubbed China by refusing to attend the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.

"Gordon has a long-standing appointment which couldn't be broken," said a spokesman.

"Anyone looking at Gordon Brown would agree he desperately needs to wash his hair that night."



"It's not a stab vest, it's body armour in case I bump into Nick Clegg"

FOOD ADDITIVES BAN

THERE WERE calls today for articles about the dangers of food additives to be banned.

"Parents only have to read as few as two of these articles per day containing details of how many E-numbers they're feeding their children for them to become cranky, irritable, hyperactive and impossible to live with," said a nutritionist.

COUNCIL SPY ROW

THE COUNCIL at the centre of the catchment area spy row last night refused to be drawn on the extent of its surveillance activities.

A spokesman for the Dorset council said, "The name's Perkins. James Perkins.

"I *could* tell you whether the council was involved in spying" he added, "but then I'd have to kill you."

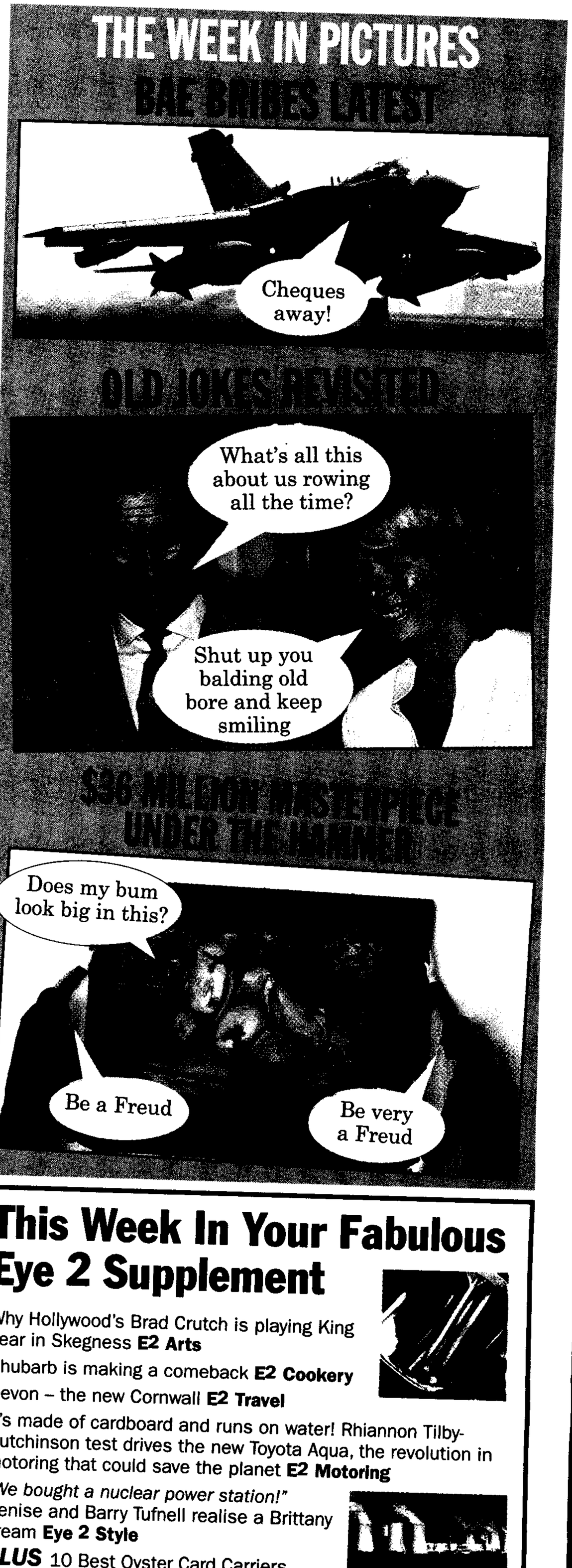
TESSA JOWELL LATEST

TESSA Jowell, the government minister running Labour's campaign in London, has confirmed that she has banned Labour ministers from referring to the Conservative candidate for mayor simply as "Boris".

"The last thing we want is him sounding cuddly and friendly, so I've told ministers they can only call him names I know the electorate detest from the list below."

That list of alternative names in full:

- **Gordon**
- **Ken**
- **Allstair**
- **Jack**
- **Ed**
- **Tessa**


THE WEEK IN PICTURES
BAE BRIBES LATEST
Cheques away!
OLD JOKES REVISITED
What's all this about us rowing all the time?
Shut up you balding old bore and keep smiling
$36 MILLION MASTERPIECE UNDER THE HAMMER
Does my bum look big in this?
Be a Freud
Be very a Freud

This Week In Your Fabulous Eye 2 Supplement

Why Hollywood's Brad Crutch is playing King Lear in Skegness **E2 Arts**

Rhubarb is making a comeback **E2 Cookery**

Devon – the new Cornwall **E2 Travel**

It's made of cardboard and runs on water! Rhiannon Tilby-Hutchinson test drives the new Toyota Aqua, the revolution in motoring that could save the planet **E2 Motoring**

"We bought a nuclear power station!" Denise and Barry Tufnell realise a Brittany dream **Eye 2 Style**

PLUS 10 Best Oyster Card Carriers

All in Eye 2 – It's unmissable!

ZIMBABWE ★ TIMES
8000 MILLION DOLLARS

Country Going To Rack And Ruin But Leader Refuses To Step Down

by Our London Correspondent **HARARE BELAFONTE**

HOUSE PRICES plummeting. Food and fuel prices soaring. A once-proud economy in total meltdown.

This is the grim picture that confronts millions of ordinary Britons as they face the most uncertain future they will ever know.

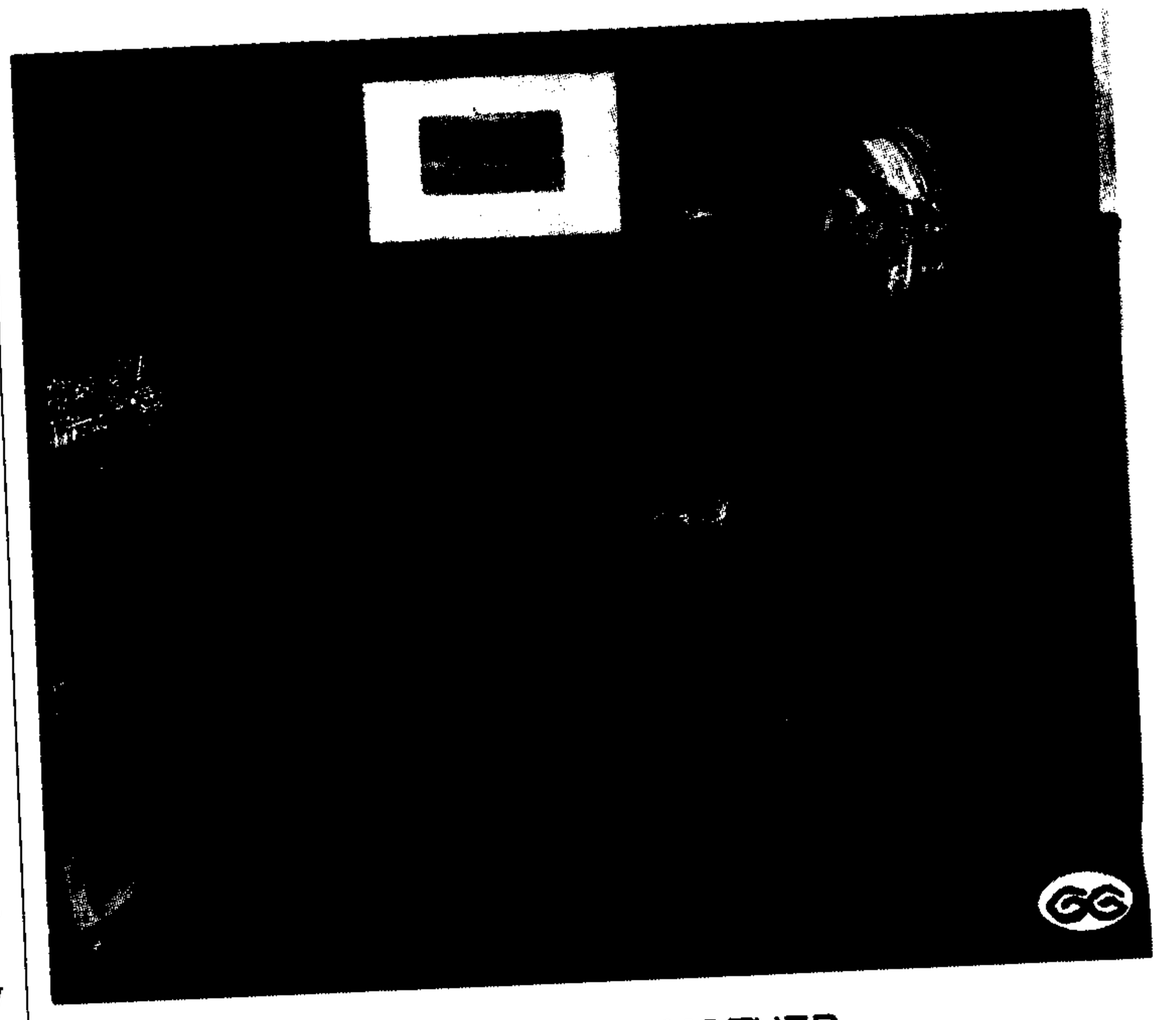
Harare, Harare,
While Stocks Last

Anger is mounting against the hated tyrant who presides over this sea of chaos, seemingly powerless to halt his country's slide to total disaster.

In his luxuriously appointed palace in London's exclusive Downing Street, the country's leader carries on as if nothing was wrong, claiming that the economy under his direction has never been stronger.

But nothing he says is any longer believed by the long-suffering

(cont. p. 94)



WHISTLER'S MOTHER

PROTESTS OVER ZIMBABWE ELECTION IRREGULARITIES

by Our Zimbabwe Correspondent **Gerry Mander**

A SPOKESMAN for Robert Mugabe's Zanu PF party has confirmed that a number of election officials have been arrested over voting irregularities.

"There appears to have been numerous examples where millions of votes cast for the opposition MDC party were counted, and not thrown in the bin or fed to the goats, which is certainly highly irregular."

In other cases ballot boxes which would once have been stuffed with votes from dead people for the Zanu PF party, and with the dead people themselves, were instead filled with actual genuine ballot papers supporting the MDC.

Said the spokesman, "This kind of activity is highly democratic and needs to be stamped out immediately."

"There's so much violence and intimidation in their politics"

Those Zimbabwe Election Results

Matabeleland West: F.B. Mugabe (no relation) ZANU PF, 2; P.B.W. Muzorewa, Movement For Getting Rid Of The Tyrant Mugabe, 106,412.
(ZANU elected. No change)

Harare South: Beatama M'Bully, ZANU PF, 3; Rev Jeremiah Nkomo, Movement For Overthrowing The Hated Despot Mugabe, 164,126.
(ZANU elected. No change)

Bulawayo East: Auberon Waugh-Veteran, ZANU PF, 0 *(That's enough rigged election results. Ed.)*

NEASDEN CHAIRMAN IN DAWN RAID DRAMA

By Our Man in the 4x4 with the Mozzarella Melt and Latte to Go

THE SOCCER world was rocked to its foundations when two of the game's most colourful and controversial characters were held after a dawn raid by Neasden police yesterday.

Neasden Club chairman Brigadier "Buffy" Cohen and a woman described as one of the club's directors, former top model Sandra Geestring, were later charged with a number of offences relating to tax evasion and transfer fees.

In recent years Brig. Cohen has diversified his multi-million launderama business empire into a wide range of leisure activities including such "adult" magazines as *Players' Wives*, *Players' Girlfriends* and *Sunday Roast*.

Pornality

But last night Neasden fans (Sid and Doris Bonkers) and the club's 59-year-old ashen-faced manager Ron Knee accused the police of over-reacting.

"Everyone in the club knows the chairman and the directors are crooks," Knee told a hastily-convened press conference in the Boston Arms. "If you want my opinion the police have better things to do than arresting criminals."

Late score

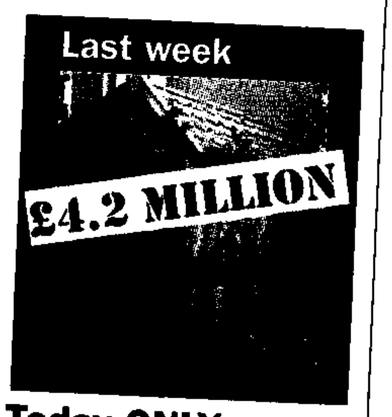
North Circular Charity Shield Second Leg

Al Qaeda All-Stars *(Bin Laden 6, Pevsner o.g 1)* 7
Neasden 0

Daily Mail
FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2008

Today ONLY
£2.6 million

Today ONLY
£3.85 million



Today ONLY
£4.19 million

HOUSE PRICES IN MELTDOWN

The Horror We Thought We Would Never See

by Our Collapsing Property Market Correspondent **H.I. Pack**

MILLIONS of Britons were looking into the abyss last night as they saw the value of their precious homes plummeting to unimaginable depths.

It was every householder's worst nightmare – to see their most valuable asset suddenly slumping into 'negative equity' before their very eyes.

Said one weeping pensioner, Albert Weems, 67, a retired bus driver from Leytonstone, "Last week this highly desirable semi-detached in a leafy suburb, close to tube and shops, was worth £7 million quid. Now the estate agents say they couldn't give it away.

"Mind you," he went on, "my wife Iris and I have no inention of selling up and moving out to a caravan site in Canvey Island, like my brother Reg. If you ask me *(cont. p. 94)*

● **Full story and more pics** 18-24

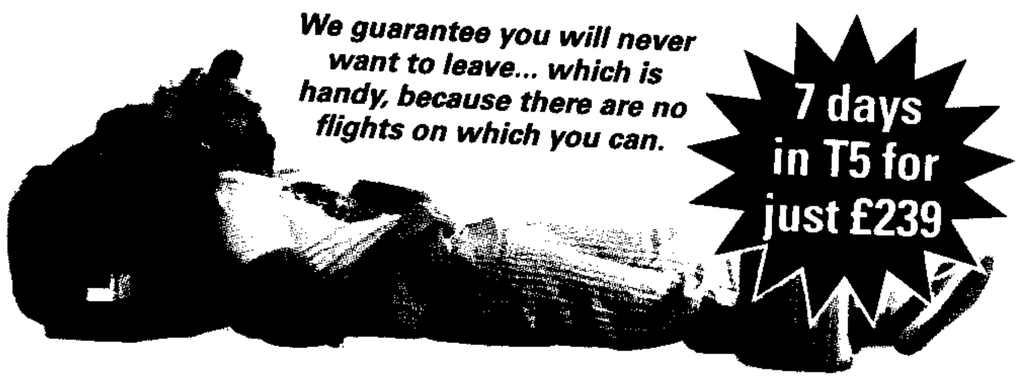
Advertisement

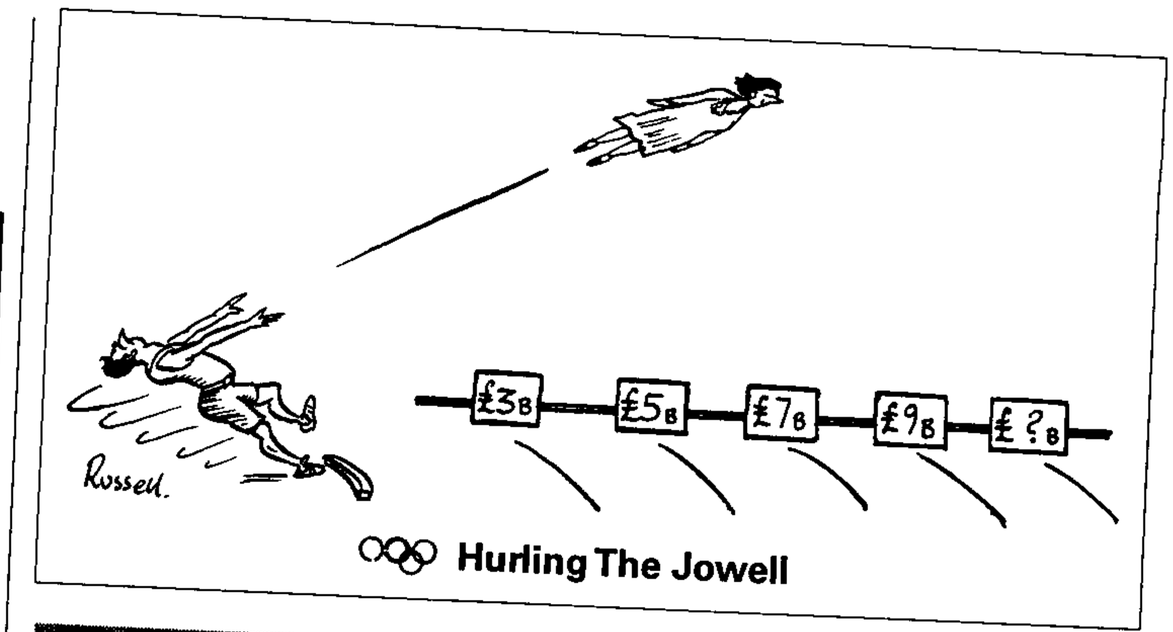
B.A. WORLD OFFERS

With a choice of sleeping on a plastic chair or in a cardboard box on the floor, Terminal 5 offers you a very different sort of holiday experience.

After a day spent sampling the wide choice of airport information desks where you can while away your day screaming at BA staff over the fifth cancellation of your flight, it's when the sun goes down that Terminal 5 really comes into its own. Just sit back and take in a show as our world famous team of Bulgarian cleaners take to the floor to buff it clean.

So why not join the literally millions of pieces of luggage which have discovered how much fun a week at Terminal 5 can be?


We guarantee you will never want to leave... which is handy, because there are no flights on which you can.
7 days in T5 for just £239



Hurling The Jowell

POLLY FILLER

WHOSE great idea was it to suggest bringing baby into work? How on earth do people imagine that I could somehow have toddler Charlie crawling all over my lap while attempting to knock out 20,000 pieces on whose idea it was to have babies coming into work?

Listen! Get one thing straight. None of us on the front line of the work/life tightrope leave the children at home because we want to. Unlike the Useless Simon, who sees it as his duty to bury himself in the lounge all day watching repeats of Nigella Express. (What is wrong with him?). What we working mums are doing when we get our taxi into the office is providing vital job opportunities for those young women who are given invaluable insight and experience of western values.

Just last week, our new girl Mona from Unprnzble in the Urals, learned how to turn on the iron – something she could never have dreamed of doing when she was a young, fresh-faced, 17-stone potato picker looking after her five children in the freezing snow.

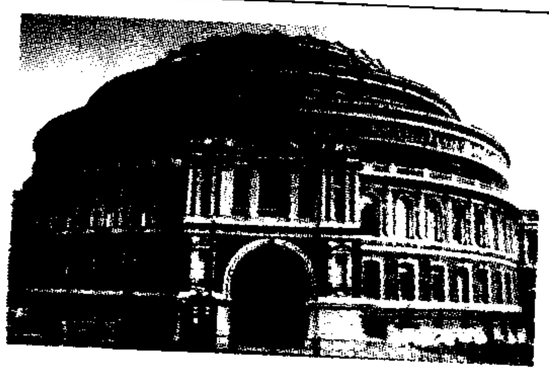
NOW, for absolutely nothing, I've taught her how to use a tumbledryer (which she's almost mastered apart from putting Simon's M&S gastro-pub-experience meal into it, thinking it was the microwave). And now she's a lot wiser since we narrowly averted disaster when she tried to hoover the carpet with our Qualcast lawnstrimmer. (And poorer, since she's found out how expensive a top-of-the-range Peter Jones carpet can cost!)

In her own time (3-4 every other morning) she has even worked out how to book her flight home via the internet! Well done, Mona – and the Fillers (mainly me, naturally!).

So the next time some airhead starts laying down the law about bringing your kids to work, just read this out to them. That'll shut their stupid mouths. Trust me, they'll be speechless!!

© Polly Filler.

Polly's new book of columns 'Mummy Can't Buy You Love' *is available from Pearson, Williams, Johnson and Millard, price £19.99*

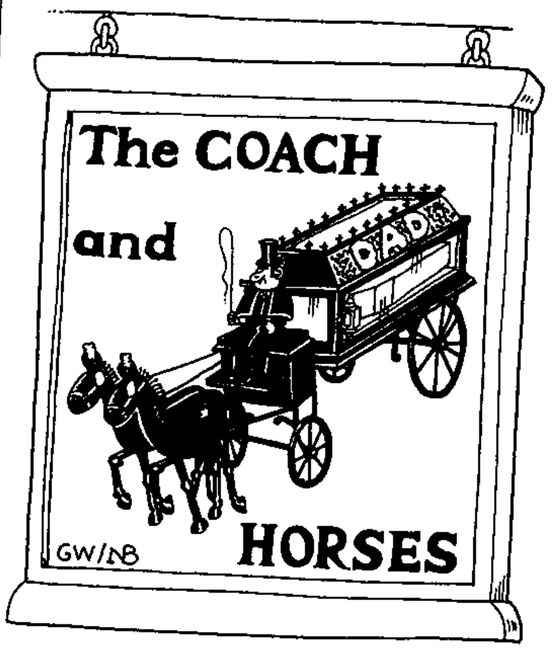


Proms 2008

What you will hear:

Dum-di-dum
dum-di-dum
dum-di-dum
Wooeeeeeeoooooeeee ♪

MODERN INN SIGNS



From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Olympic Torch Protests

"FREE TIBET" say the protesters but they seem to be young and foreigner's – do they know anything about tibet? Im study-ing this in history at college, and tibet dun a lot of real bad stuff with maggy thatcher back in the day – he ended up in jail with jefry archer and jonethen acorn. imo he shoud do his time. learn from history ppl! – ***Jace_91***

I am anything but typical rent-a-mob fodder, as those who read my pamphlets will know. So why did I try to extinguish the flame? Because I am sick to death of New Labour's hypocrisy.
For ten years these so-called guardians of health and safety have lectured us on everything from smoking and drinking to the dangers of conkers. Then, with the eyes of the world upon us, we see government-picked role models like Sir Stephen and Dame Kelly waving a naked flame in front of impressionable children (and under the noses of a phalanx of burly policemen!)
Some say I am guilty of making a mountain out of a molehill (not a criminal offence – yet!) but this is how the great fire of London started.
Incidentally, my costume was a giant finger (symbolising the wagging finger of the nanny state) and not the unsavoury appendage reported in the "news" media. – ***Edwin***

Me agen edwin, thanx for them leaflits bruv – ***Zaks_bak***

Government Backs Cadet Corps For State Schools

YES cadet's shud sort out r vilent school's ful of knife's and gun's. BUT army gun's dont work so they wud be put in un-acseptable danger? lol!!– ***Darren_Coff***

Primary Schools Ban Gay Books

Good the school has band the book with the 2 gay pengins bring-ing up the baby pengin BUT wat about them paper-back's with the little pengin lo-go's – ok 4 concerting adult's but NOT 4 kid's? tipical nu labor fudge (no pun attended lol!) - ***Darling_Deneyze***

St George's Day

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT: Wednesday 23rd April is SAINT GEORGE'S DAY. I know that no one will read this because the "moderator" will CENSOR it but I am writing as a matter of PRINCIPLE (remember that word Gordon Brown?) At least I will be able to read it myself on my computer. (Until the police confiscate it under New Labour's anti-English laws – I am therefore memorising it too.) :: – ***Cry_for_Harry_Winston_Sir_Alf_and_St_George***

DRAWING ALL FAITHS TOGETHER

Global Director: The Rev. A.R.P. Blair (MA Oxon)
Patrons: HRH The Prince of Wales, Rabbi Julia Beefburger, Iman Max Mullah, His Holiness The Dalai Lama, The Late L. Ron Hubbard

This introductory letter is addressed to all believers (and, of course, non-believers!) from Our Global Director, The Rev. Tony Blair

Dear Friends,

I am writing you this letter as the recently retired vicar of a very successful parish in England, St Albion's, where I was privileged to serve the local community for ten rewarding and eventful years.

I know from personal experience the divisions which have long existed between men and women of different faiths – Jews and Moslems, Protestants and Catholics, Moslems and Jews, Hindus and Sikhs.

And how wasteful and destructive all those old enmities can be!

And, hey!, if only all that hatred could be channelled into more positive feelings of love and compassion, we must all of us have thought!

Now that I have retired and been given the time to do something more worthwhile with my life, my fondest dream is that I might be the one who can bring all this about!

I won't pretend that this is going to be an easy task.

These feelings of hostility in some cases go back many centuries, and will be very hard to root out.

But, you know, the real problem lies only with a tiny minority of extremists – the sort of people who always want everything their own way!

We all know people like that, don't we?

So will you support my campaign and the work of D.A.F.T. to bring reconciliation between all faiths and lasting peace to the world?

It's very simple. All you have to do is send as much money as you can afford, so that I can get on as soon as possible with the serious business of flying all over the world and staying in agreeable hotels.

Yours 'multi-faithfully'(!)

Tony Blair

(Global Director, D.A.F.T.)

'MAKING A BETTER TOMORROW TODAY'

IN THE COURTS

The Inquest on the Death of the Late Diana, Princess of Wales Before Mr Justice Cocklecarrot. Day 95.

Sir Michael Hugefee QC (for the plantiff, Mr Mohamed Al Fugger): My lord, I am informed by my client that he has sadly come to the end of his financial resources with regard to this case, and that in the light of these unfortunate circumstances, you will understand, I shall no longer be able to represent him as I have done over the last three years!

Mr Justice Scottlecarrot: I do indeed understand your tragic plight, Sir Michael, and so with some feelings of personal relief I must pronounce without any further delay my verdict of "not guilty!" Perhaps, Sir Michael, you would like to join me for luncheon at our usual table at the Garrick Club.

The case was concluded.

Late score
Sir Michael Hugefee.....£2.75 bn

"Not going... not going... not gone!"

THE OTHER BERLIN GIRL (12A)

Stars Natalie Portman and Scarlett Johanssen

Savoy Theatre, Monmouth

A catologue of errors by Monmouth

Monmouthshire Beaon

SIX TO WATCH

China's top team who are going to set the Olympics alight in Beijing in 2008

Po-kin-i
6'3" Mandarin muscle man who's hotly tipped to beat the opposition soundly at break-neck speed in the Tibetan protest race

Pun-chin-face
This Samson from Szechuan is the current holder of a Tibetan protestor's testicles

Ki-kin-groin
20-stone Cantonese colossus who's been known to go all the way and often too far

Sna-pee-neck
The Hercules from Hong Kong is no pushover – unlike his competitors

Ba-shu-up
The terracotta terror, widely tipped to smash all records, ipods and personal belongings of any opponent.

That's enough Six To Watch. Ed.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Charlton Heston, Hollywood Legend

So. Farewell
Then Charlton Heston,
Famous film star.

Yes, you played many
Great roles
In your career.

Moses, El Cid –
And of course
Ben Hur.

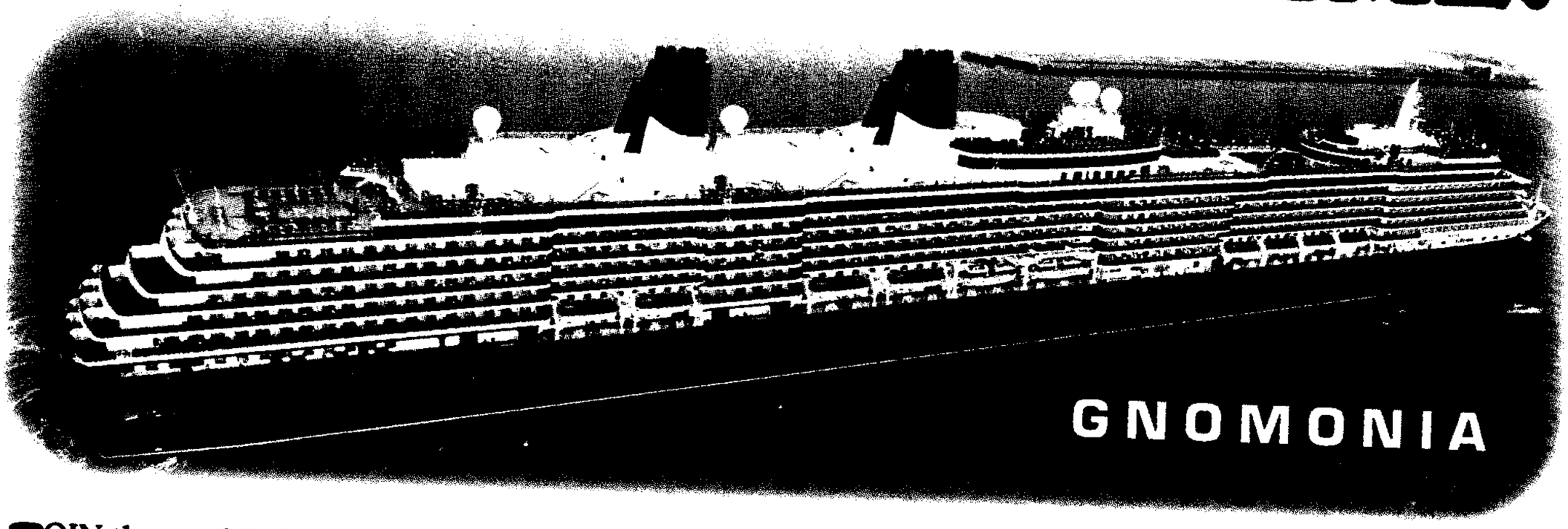
But perhaps your greatest
Role of all was
God.

Now you will be
Able to see
Whether you got it
Right.

El Thribb (17½)

Advertisement Feature

CRUISE OF A LIFETIME!



JOIN the world's largest-ever super cruise-liner, the *Gnomonia*, on her maiden voyage.

Be one of the chosen 10 million passengers who will have the privilege of sailing on this first, historic, never-to-be-forgotten voyage of discovery from Southampton to Bilbao.

Just look at these unique features that make the *Gnomonia* the envy of the sea-going world.

£**The 4,500,000-ton *Gnomonia* is as big as the Isle of Wight, with seven million luxury cabins, each with its own private swimming pool.**

£**10,000 restaurants, with a menu personally supervised by Delia Smith, will serve round-the-clock pizzas with every conceivable topping.**

£***Watch* the world's finest teams fight it out for the 'Gnomonia World Cup' in the ship's Wembley-replica stadium.**

£***Enjoy* the sight of Lewis Hamilton and the rest as they stage epic Formula-One-style races around B Deck's eight-mile track.**

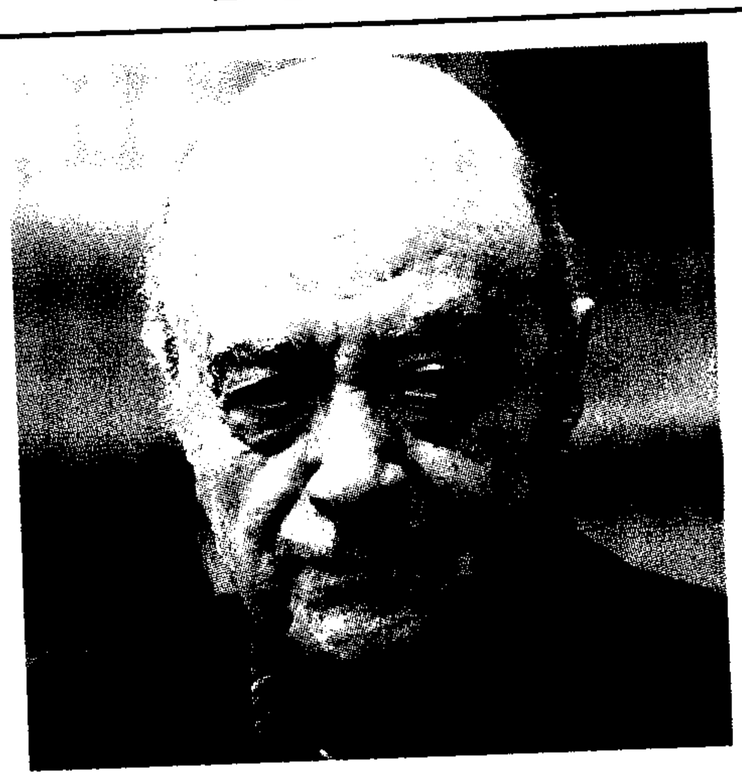
£***Climb* the life-size reconstruction of Everest, the world's highest mountain, escorted by expert Sherpa-style guides.**

These are just some of the mouth-watering activities that await you as the largest ship the world has ever seen attempts to leave harbour.

Cabin prices range from a mere £150,000 per person, up to the ship's palatial "Hollywood-Class Super-Suites" at £2,500,000.

For more information see our website www.gnomonia.com

DIARY



MOHAMED'S LITTLE HELPERS

MOHAMED: You know what I am think? I am think there is a man in the moon. I tell you, you looking very hard, you seeing his face.

MACNAMARA: Yes, sir! I'll commence my investigations in an upwardly direction ASAP, Mr al Fayed, sir. Like you, sir, now that I think about it I have every reason to believe that the evidence points in one direction: there's definitely a person or persons in the moon. But if I'm going to partake of a thorough investigation, sir, I'll need an extension of my monetary resources, if you get my meaning, sir.

MOHAMED: Pick up your envelope from reception, John. It will contains many shilling. Millions of people, they know in their hearts there is man in moon. They look up, they seeing him every night. Is Establishment cover-up. But I am the only person who tell the truth. You tell them, Katharine. Here is your envelope, my dear.

KATHARINE WITTY: That's an awfully super envelope, Mohamed. Thanks ever so much.

"Mr Mohamed al Fayed wishes to express his concern that many millions of ordinary, decent Britons have been denied the right to find out about the man in the moon, even though every reputable expert in the world agrees that he exists.

"Mohamed is a loving family man who only wants to know the truth. For too long the man in the moon has been ignored and vilified. It is time we heard his side of the story."

***

MOHAMED: Excellent, my dear. You, me we make beautfiul music together. Michael, what you thinking to this question? You think there is man in moon? You agree?

COLE: I not only agree with you, Mohamed. I am utterly convinced, and as an old friend and trusted colleague, I will help you every inch of the way in your bid to determine his existence.

MOHAMED: Excellent! We all agreeing! Here your envelope, Michael!

COLE: Most kind, Mohamed, most kind!

MOHAMED: Now you give me many proofings for man in moon. Ready, steady, going!

COLE: "Mr al Fayed is a grieving father who has given many millions of pounds to charity. It is widely agreed that he has spent his every waking hour thinking only of others and seeking to feed the starving and to comfort those in distress. It is only right that we should listen to him now when he tells us about the man in the moon."

MOHAMED: Is excellent, Michael, is excellent! You tell it like it isn't! Here your second envelope! Make lovely bulge, no?

COLE: All the evidence proves not only that the man in the moon exists, but that he recently announced his engagement to Mr Fayed's beloved daughter.

MOHAMED: Is the fact! And don't forget tell them the moon is made of cheese, Michael!

COLE: Eh?

MOHAMED: Is made of cheese! Moon made of cheese! Say, it, Michael! Say it, I ordering you!

COLE: "Furthermore, top scientists all attest that, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the moon is definitely made of the finest cheese, most probably a prize-winning combination of Camembert and our own great British Cheddar. To deny the essential cheesiness of the moon is, I regret to say, an insidious form of racism."

MOHAMED: Is fact! Is fact! They racist! Here my shiny new shilling, Michael! My rewarding for you to tell the facts!

***

MOHAMED: QC, why you so quiet?

MANSFIELD: I was merely considering how right you were on this question, Mohamed, as on so many others. The apparent cheesiness of the moon is beyond doubt.

MOHAMED: And I pay you plenty-plenty to proving there being in court man in the moon, yes?

MANSFIELD: I would be deeply honoured and privileged to accept this commission, Mohamed.

MOHAMED: You showing me how, QC, or you no get my big fat envelopings!

MANSFIELD: "I put it to you, expert witness, that you are seeking to suggest that there is no man in the moon for one reason and one reason only: you cannot bear to tell the truth. And have you or have you not spent the past five years conspiring to cover up the cheesy flavour of the moon? Answer the question – Yes or no?! Yes or no?!"

MOHAMED: Is facts! Is facts! Excellent! Now you tell them about the cow!

MANSFIELD: The cow, Mohamed?

MOHAMED: The cow jump over the moon, is famous cow, you imbecile! You tell them or I no pay you big money!

MANSFIELD: Ah, yes – the cow that jumped over the moon! How could I have forgotten?! "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you have heard a number of witnesses claim under oath that they have no knowledge – I repeat, no knowledge, ha! – of a cow jumping over the moon. Yet we have all of us heard of the cow in question. Its existence is indisputable. Regrettably, these witnesses stand to leave this courtroom with their reputations in tatters. But no individual is more important than the truth. Yes, members of the jury, there was a cow, there was a moon, and the cow did jump over the moon. I rest my case."

MOHAMED: Is brilliant! Extra cash for my QC! Plus big Harrods hamper for wife and lady friends!

***

KATHARINE WITTY: "Mohamed is a grieving father and devoted family man. He will not cease to fight for truth and justice the world over. After many secret conversations not only with the man in the moon, but also with the cow, the cat, the dish, the spoon, the little dog and, indeed, the fiddle, he is convinced that many questions remain to be answered. It is a matter of deep regret to Mohamed that the Government, the Secret Services and the Royal Family continue to conspire to keep the truth surrounding the man in the moon from the British public. There remains just one more thing left to say.

My envelope, please, Mohamed.

MOHAMED: You fancying bite to eat, my darling?

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

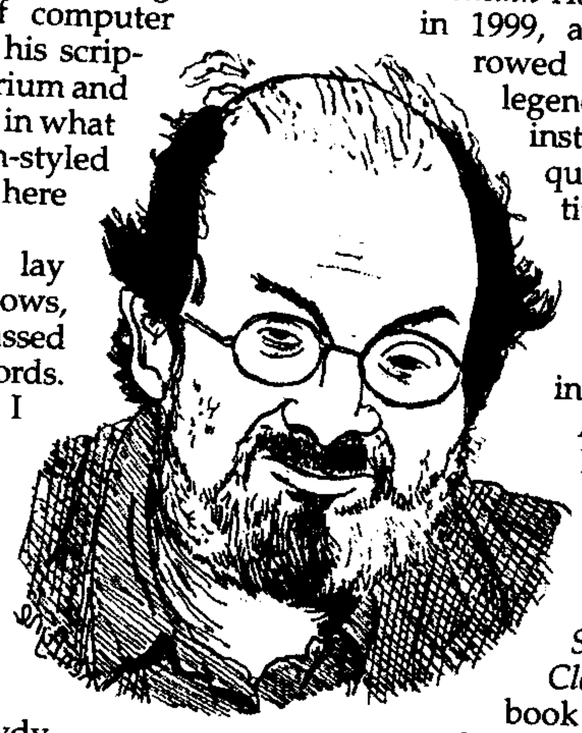
"He always felt strongly about re-using plastic bags"

Literary Review

Farmed Salman

The Enchantress of Florence
Salman Rushdie
(Cape, £18.99)

SALMAN the Insulter gazed at the map in his study. Here in his office, his library, his counting house of extravagant plots and side plots and sub-plots and red herrings and calculated metafictional sleights of hand, of pen, of computer keyboard; here in his scriptorium and auditorium and laboratorium, here in what might be dog-latin-styled his novellarium – here he was safe.



The world lay beyond his windows, and yet he encompassed the world in his words. He was the great I Write, though he had also been called Ingrate, Blasphemer, Traitor, Apostate and, by at least one of his wives, the Bearded Twat, or somesuch bawdy gibe. He did not care. He cared not a jot or scintilla. He was omnipotent, omniscient, omnivorous. And so forth. Now about the map.

The map was to help him decide where to set his next novel. But the map could have told him something else, something of which he might very well be quite unaware (and of which, aware or not, he was surely entirely innocent). A mysterious jinx, which we shall call the Curse of Rushdie. Its victims were the places where Salman set his novels.

First, or at any rate foremost, there was En Why See, or NYC or New Yorick Settee or what you will. *Fury*, he had called the book, and a fury had certainly been unleashed, barely a fortnight after publication in the stolen idyllic summer of 2001. Twin towers told the tale. On the book's cover there had been a tower of Empire State. Or was it the Chrysler? No matter. One tower of penile arrogance was as good as another, or two others, and if one of a pair had been felled, well then, so had the other.

Neither he nor the book was to blame. *The curse was not of his doing.* Someone, evidently, had cast a spell on him, some witch of the wicked west, some jade of the mysterious east, some sibyl or sorceress, some Morgan le Fay. No one knew who. Nor why: for that too was a mystery.

And yet, now one came to think of it, the Big Apple was not the first of those victims of coincidence. There had been Mexico before that, setting of the climactic scene of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, published in 1999, a jumble of borrowed myths and pop legends. Except that instead of the earthquake to which the title referred, the victim nation suffered, not long afterwards, its worst flooding for 40 years.

An earthquake had gone instead to Kashmir, the subject of Rushdie's most recent novel, *Shalimar the Clown* (2005). The book was barely off the presses when the place suffered the worst tremors in living history.

Why should these several catastrophes have so mysteriously coincided with publication of Salman's last three novels? Was India, the scene of so much of Rushdie's fiction, including his latest, destined yet again to fall foul of the fabled curse? Was Florence, which shared pride of place in the new book, and which was depicted in the grip of at least one mysterious enchantment in the course of its tumultuous narrative, also destined to fall prey to the fabled Curse of Rushdie?

These were the questions that remained unanswered, as the great author blithely consulted the map in his study. Nor was that the only thing he had consulted. Let us not overlook all those books on his desk, the ones he claimed to have looked over, and which were listed at the end of the novel in an impressive-looking bibliography (to make the book look more intellectually coherent).

Chief among them (and apparently the very cornerstone of the new edifice) was *A Mirror of Princes: The Mughals and the Medici* by one Dalu Jones. For the novel was set in both the India of the Mughal emperors and the Florence of the Renaissance. Its narrative combined history, mystery, fact and legend; it was fantastic and extravagant and full of *style*, which was to say "verbal pyrotechnics", or sound and fury signifying not much, and no one would be able to tell what the hell was going on when or where or to whom.

If there was a plot, it might be something along these lines. A flaxen-haired Florentine trickster, calling himself (among other names and aliases) Mogor dell'Amore, the Mughal of Love, having managed to lie, steal and cheat his way into the imperial court of Akbar the Great in sixteenth century Sikri, then spins (to save his life) a fantastic yarn in which he claims to be Akbar's long-lost uncle. Disbelief is quickly suspended to enable tales within this tale to be told, variously concerning a missing princess somewhere further up the emperor's family tree; three fifteenth century Florentine friends, one of whom goes east, one west, and the third of whom is Machiavelli; and the various battles, victories and defeats by which the princess and one of the Florentines are thrown together and end up in the city state of a resurgent Medici prince.

Mixed up in all this are frequently bawdy sub-plots involving pulchritudinous princesses, imaginary wives or concubines, scheming harlots and saucy sorceresses, often arranged in mirrored pairs, all no doubt intended to underline a general theme about the twinhood of balanced opposites: east/west, man/woman, warrior/poet, wife/whore, priest/witch, and so forth.

There was more to it than that, of course, for the whole thing came wrapped up in Salman's usual clotted, jumbled, "eclectic" style, adding sugar and spice and all things nice, and bits of books and other men's tales, and dirty talk of pricks and whores, and borrowed myths and ancient legends, piling Burton upon Ovid, Pelion upon Ossa, puff upon pant upon wheeze upon gasp.

And the final mystery was why, when he did all this, they loved it, and they in their turn piled prize upon prize, award on award, Booker on Booker, and even her Majesty's knightly sword… But that still didn't explain the curse. (Ye that dwell on the banks of the Arno: take heed.)

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Cold Cream: My Early Life and Other Mistakes
Ferdinand Mount
(Bloomsbury, £20)

IT IS an odd, sequestered childhood I live here in the cottage beneath the Wiltshire downs, seeing no one, preserving my embarrassed modesty with days of brooding silence, indulged only by my grandmother's nanny Miss Fothergill, who will later go on to look after David Cameron and marry the Duke of Northumberland.

"What a quiet life this is," I remember saying to Siegfried Sassoon, or perhaps it was T.S. Eliot – I can't remember – at about this time. "Oh, I don't know," Sassoon remarks – in fact, now I remember, it was Eliot –"Let's ask Graham and Evelyn here what they think." But what Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh think is lost in an invitation from a tall man with a moustache, who may have been Harold Macmillan, to come and play horsey-horsey on the lawn.

* * *

Although I never think to complain about it, it is a queer hand that fate has dealt me. Of course I am completely useless at everything: shy, diffident, lonely, intellectually uncertain, an eternal victim of self-doubt and the *mauvais quart d'heure*. We have no money and my father is an amateur jockey. "If I believed for one moment in discussing affairs of a personal nature," I tell my friend Prince Michael of Kent, when we meet at our exclusive prep school, "I should be jolly miffed about all these terrible handicaps." Sometimes I wonder how, in the face of these disadvantages, I manage to win a scholarship to Eton, write several well-regarded novels and edit the *Times Literary Supplement*. It can only be down to luck.

* * *

I am sixteen, gauche, spotty, inexperienced, dumb… [*continues*], standing with my mother before the Leaning Tower of Pisa. "I say," she says, staring shrewdly at the crowd of tourists. "I'm sure I know that chap. Isn't it the Pope?" "No," I venture, a dim memory of one of the guests at my uncle Tony the famous novelist's house rising in my consciousness. "Surely it's Charlie Chaplin?" "Don't be silly," she says. "It's Oofy Ffiennes-Twistleton." And so she explains about Oofy Ffiennes-Twistleton, whose real name is apparently Canteloupe-Castleton, and whose mother was Amanda Fyfe-Farthingale (née Parakeet), Viscount Voletrouser's step-daughter, and the time passes very pleasantly.

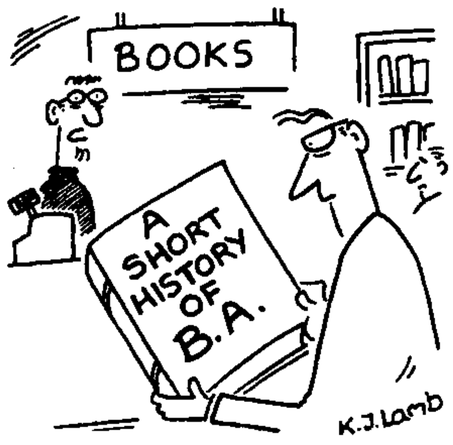
* * *

I have no idea why I am asked to work for Mrs Thatcher, as I have no real political convictions and cannot write for toffee, but somehow here I am pouring her tea in 10 Downing Street and trying to look enthusiastic. "That's a very bad cold you have there, Ferdy," Mrs Thatcher says.

"It's really nothing, Prime Minister," I tell her. "There are some

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
YOU'LL HAVE TO READ THAT OUTSIDE
I WANT TO QUIT BUT DON'T HAVE THE WILLPOWER
I KNOW IT'S BAD FOR ME!
...AND IT'S FAR TOO EXPENSIVE
THE BUTT
WILL SELF
ELECTRICALS

aspirins in my bag," she goes on. In my haste not to draw further attention to myself I accidentally dislodge several vases of cut flowers over her skirt and set off the fire alarm. Fortunately Mrs Thatcher is jolly decent about this, and we settle down to discuss the Falklands War.



"That one hasn't exactly been flying off the shelves"

Books & Bookmen

■ SOMEONE really should stop Professor John Sutherland making a fool of himself by continuing to write paeans to Salman Rushdie's novels, whatever their merits.

Resembling a besotted and rather troubling fan, the otherwise sane prof began his cheerleading career with an *Evening Standard* review of the embarrassing *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* headlined "The 1999 Booker Prize winner", and ending "this is a great novel. Buy it. Please". He was a Booker judge that year, but it wasn't even on the shortlist.

In 2005, when he rose to chairman of the judges, he hailed the dreadful *Shalimar the Clown* as Rushdie "writing at his best". Again, it wasn't shortlisted.

Now Sutherland has gone into his high-kicking, pom-pom waving routine once more to fete *The Enchantress of Florence* (see accompanying review) declaring that if it doesn't win the Booker "I'll curry my proof copy and eat it". Given the earlier pronouncements and the apparent Curse of Sutherland, Rushdie and his publisher may have been less thrilled by this latest enthusiasm.

■ SINEAD MORRISSEY, a Belfast-based Carcanet poet, has just won the National Poetry Competition. Although entries are anonymous, the judges are poets or poetry publishers who can often identify contestants by subject or style.

As the judging panel included Carcanet supremo Michael Schmidt, this continues a series of 2008 results that don't do much to counter poetry prizes' reputation for rewarding mates or teammates.

The TS Eliot prize, chaired by Picador poet Peter Porter, went to Picador poet Sean O'Brien. And the Costa (formerly Whitbread) poetry award, with a panel consisting only of a bookseller and Cape poet Vicki Feaver, went to Cape poet Jean Sprackland. Add to all that the recent murder confession by the sponsor of the Forward best first collection prize, Felix Dennis (although he later tried to retract it), and it's not been a good start to the year in "po biz".

■ THERE must be something in the water at the *Observer*, because its journalists seem unable to stop themselves producing copycat versions of each other's books.

Last year columnist Nick Cohen published his *What's Left? How Liberals Lost Their Way*, followed seven months later by Andrew Anthony's stunningly similar tome, *The Fallout: How A Guilty Liberal Lost His Innocence*.

The response was slower to TV critic Kathryn Flett's 1999 pioneering middle-class misery memoir, *The Heart-Shaped Bullet* (covering her marriage break-up and descent into depression), but the past fortnight has seen not only reporter Lorna Martin's *Woman on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, but also former deputy literary editor Stephanie Merritt's *The Devil Within: A Memoir of Depression* – bizarrely serialised in the paper's magazine with no indication the "national broadsheet" the author found it so stressful to work on was... the *Observer*.

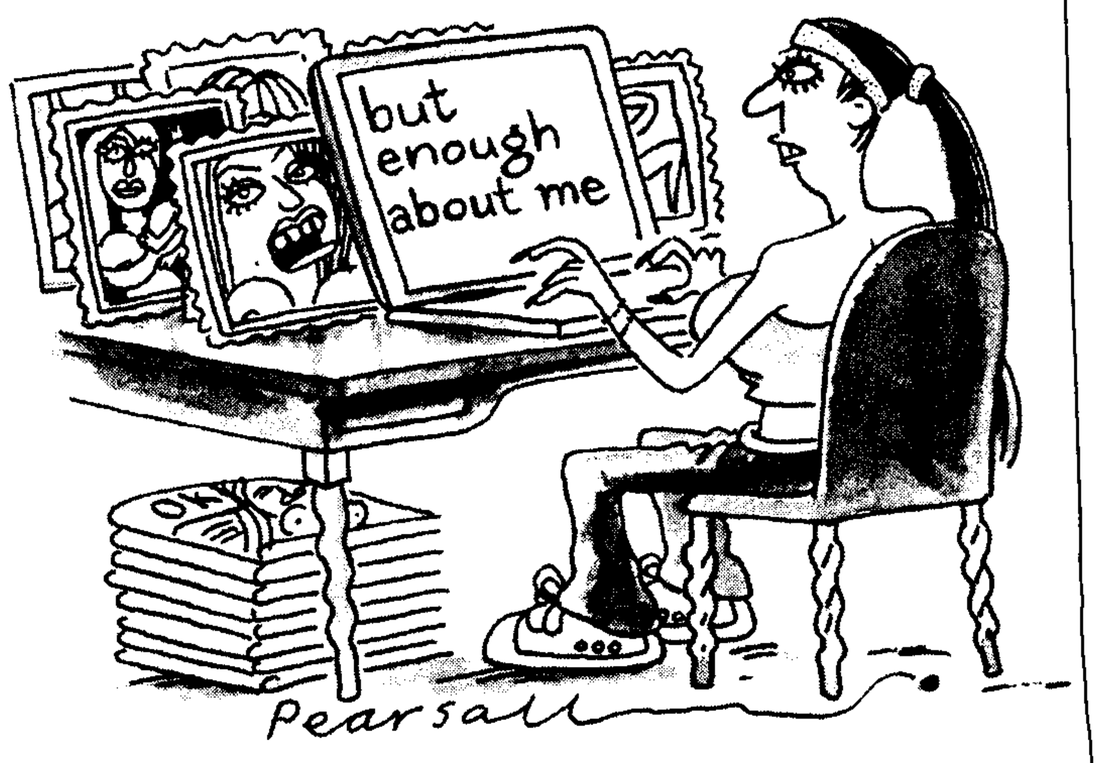
■ IT WAS the uncompromising bleakness of David Kynaston's *Austerity Britain 1945-51* that amazingly propelled the history tome to the top of the bestseller lists last year.

Its plain-speaking title and gloriously austere cover – a mother and child walking down a rainy street of terraced housing, with a monstrous power station dominating the view – both contributed to its appeal: the children and grandchildren of those who lived through the post-war era bought it to revel in the contrast to their own affluent, pampered lives.

But evidently that's not what Bloomsbury believes: the publisher seems to think it succeeded despite its subject. Not so much dumbed-down as daftly lightened-up, the just-published paperback edition takes the kind of drastic action usually associated with mortifying flops: the title is effectively changed to the upbeat *A World to Build* (off-putting *Austerity Britain 1945-51* is retained only in tiny print at the top of the jacket), and the chosen image is jollier and more middle class, showing a dad on a bike towing a baby. Why?

'Bookworm'

First Drafts

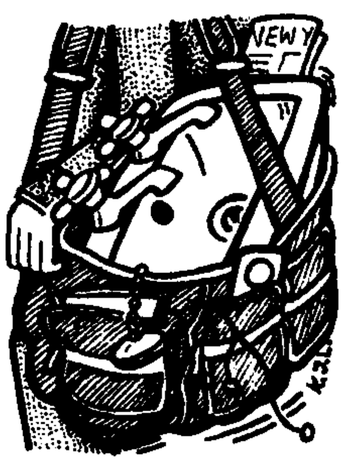


Katie Price

Pseuds Corner

What's in your manbag? Generic stuff: leather gloves, lip balm, an iPod. A book called Nigger, which is an interesting cultural study on the word. Wallet – it's Comme des Garcons, a lovely present from my girlfriend and a great size and design. The New Yorker – it's my favourite magazine and the only one I subscribe to. Moleskin notebook – when I am walking around or on the tube I like to write down things I am thinking about.

Can you judge a man by his manbag?
Increasingly so – urban man can be divided between those with a bag, and those without. I would ask questions about a man without a bag – I don't know how he could manage.



ICA Creative Director EKOW ESHUN,
Guardian

I have come home from a long stay in Mexico to find – because of the presidential campaign, and especially because of the Obama-Clinton race for the Democratic nomination – a new country existing alongside the old. On any given day we, collectively, become the goddess of the three directions and can look back into the past, look at ourselves just where we are, and take a glance, as well, into the future. It is a space with which I am familiar.

ALICE WALKER,
Guardian

What have you sacrificed for your art?
The blessed curse of the artist is always to remain on the outside, reprocessing every situation. Sometimes I used to wish I could just enjoy myself.

PATTI SMITH,
Guardian

It was Virgil who states in his Eclogues "Non omnia possumus omnes" (We can't all do everything), a statement which many have been happy to oblige. In Nicholas de Lacy-Brown, however, there lies a man who is prepared to question such apathy. Undoubtedly a man of many talents, he has lived his short twenty-four years with a vivacity and boldness which few could achieve in a lifetime... *[continues]*

Web biography of 'Apprentice' contestant
NICHOLAS DE LACY-BROWN

By exploring the relationship between sexuality, ethnicity and migration, the study will uncover ways in which contemporary sexual citizenship, migration and LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] imaginaries of the metropolis are mutually implicated in complex ways.

Sociologist ROISIN RYAN-FLOOD, leader of an Economic and Social Research Council-funded project examining the experiences of Irish homosexuals living in London, BBC website.

Pseuds Corporate

Integrating the mode-neutral perspective to stages of analysis from the strategic to intervention, recognising that better use of the existing network will be an important option. Better presenting the existing guidance but also considering how to integrate the 'strategic' policy making work into intervention level analysis.

From a Department of Transport consultation document, 'The NATA Refresh: Reviewing the New Approach to Appraisal.'

CONTRIBUTORS: Steven Buckley, Philip Wigg, Helene Parry, Benjamin Lister, Richard Hall, Paul Boulter.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

THE ACTIS SCANDAL

Highland flings

THE world's poorer countries are continuing to lose out to Actis, the privately-owned fund management arm of Britain's publicly-owned development fund, CDC, which was sold to its bosses for a fraction of its value. The *Eye* has discovered that those bosses' million-pound-a-year pay packets are only the start of the bonanza.

While Actis's accounts declare huge profits from hefty management and incentive fees paid out of CDC's development fund (see *Eyes* 1183 and 1198), even more cash is being salted away through secret outfits kept studiously *off* Actis's books.

These are Scottish limited partnerships, registered in Edinburgh and owned by the Actis bosses into which their shares of profits on sales of investments ("carried interest" in private equity parlance) are channelled. Yet when the Actis sell-off was agreed by parliament in 2004 (and at every stage since), no mention was made of these secretive entities, which aren't required to publish accounts. Development Secretary Hilary Benn only ever informed MPs and public about "management fees… calculated to equate to the anticipated total operating costs of Actis on an approximately break-even basis over the first five years".

However, papers seen by the *Eye* show that under the confidential arrangements agreed for Actis, the partnerships are entitled to between 10 percent and 20 percent of the profits on the disposals of CDC's investments. As these profits totalled around £250m up to 2006, with plenty more last year, the Scottish limited partnerships have coined it in – perhaps to the tune of more than £30m. Not a bad deal as the bosses paid no more than a few pounds each for their partnership stakes!

Documents filed in Edinburgh for the Actis Executive LP, Actis Redistribution LP, Actis House Pool LP and Actis Central Management Pool LP partnerships show that in return for putting, ahem, £336 of his own money at risk, Actis boss Paul Fletcher (pictured) is entitled to 4.5 percent of the carried interest on CDC funds. This has almost certainly netted him £1m, or a 300,000 percent or so return so far. Other bosses including Jonathan Bond, Nicholas Selbie, Donald Peck, Andrew Reicher, Alistair Mackintosh and Zimbabwean Nkosana Moyo each own slightly less and will have fared barely worse.

Actis refused to say how much carried interest the lucky Actis bosses have pocketed (to go with the bumper Actis profits already known about); but however many millions it is, it will have been taxed at just 10 percent as capital gains rather than income.

The KPMG-Spot

ALSO receiving much more than first thought from the Actis sell-off were the legions of consultants on the deal. *Eye* 1205 exposed the £2.7m paid in consultancy fees by the Department for International Development, but it now emerges that the consultants in fact trousered more.

A further £8.9m was paid direct from CDC's development funds, including £4.4m to lawyers Clifford Chance and almost £1m on PR and marketing. Then there was the £285k for branding consultants Acanchi to dream up the name Actis, the meaning of which (if any) the firm won't divulge.

Most alarming though is the £1.6m KPMG went on to trouser for work on the deal *after* it had been paid by DfID to put the (derisory) value on the sell-off, which allowed it to go ahead and provided another whopping conflict of interest for which the world's poor are paying through the nose.

The latest figures take the total paid to advisers to £11.5m, or 31 times the £373k the government received for the sale (before then paying out a £2.3m "post-transaction" bonus to the new Actis bosses).

Little and larging it

AS THE Actis bosses cream it in by managing CDC's move out of low-yielding but helpful investment in third world agriculture into the more lucrative businesses of mobile phones and shopping centres, maintaining the façade of furthering development takes some doing.

Hence the recruitment by Actis of yet more consultants in the shape of Arthur D Little to report on the "development impact" of Actis-managed funds. But why did Actis environment and social team director Mark Goldsmith turn to the suits from this firm? Surely not because they're old mates from his previous employer… Arthur D Little?

CRIMINAL COMPENSATION

Insult to injury

THE Criminal Injuries Compensation Agency (CICA) is resorting to miserably perverse calculations in order to pay out the least amount possible to those injured in terrorist bomb blasts and other crimes.

Take the case of Stephen Menary, who was just 14 years old when he was blinded, lost an ear and an arm and suffered chest and stomach injuries in an IRA bomb blast in west London in 2001. Now 21, and having had to fight for compensation for more than seven years, Stephen has finally been told he qualifies for a total of £270,306. This is just over half the maximum amount available and will have to last him until he qualifies for a state pension in 44 years' time.

To arrive at the miserly figure – the equivalent of £5,400 a year – the CICA actually deducted half, or £55,000, from the £110,000 usually paid to victims who lose their sight. Why? Because before he accidentally triggered an IRA booby trap bomb outside a territorial arm base in White City, Stephen was already blind in one eye from a rare childhood cancer. Until then, his partial sight had never affected his abilities or hindered his education. Indeed, at the time of the accident he was not registered disabled and was an army cadet. Total blindness has put paid to all that.

Using the CICA's own strict criteria (ie treating Stephen as if he had lost one eye instead of his total sight), at the very least he expected to qualify for half the amount available for total loss of hearing (£33,000) because he was rendered deaf in one ear. But no. Because of the sliding scale of sums for each injury added to his claim, Stephen received just £2,475 (or 15 percent of the £16,500 for loss of hearing in one ear). For the loss of his arm - usually £44,000 - he was awarded £13,200 (or 30 percent); and for the loss of future earnings after his education and work prospects were damaged irretrievably, Stephen was awarded just £60,000.

Like the heavily criticised scheme used by the Ministry of Defence to "compensate" wounded military personnel, the CICA pays out only for the three worst injuries. No account is taken of the cumulative effect of suffering the multiple disabilities that make Stephen's life doubly hard. While soldiers at least qualify for a military pension, albeit often a meagre one, the CICA award means Stephen loses his right to incapacity benefit and council tax relief because he has more than £16,000 in the bank.

After publicity about his plight in May last year, Stephen secured a £70,000 interim payment which will be deducted from his total award. Until then he had been living on donations raised by the army, benefits and charity. St Dunstan's, a veterans' charity, changed its rules in order to provide Stephen, then a cadet, with a rented house in Sutton Coldfield.

"I do not want to sound greedy. But this amount will give me £377.78 a month to live on – pay rent, council tax, buy food, care, travel, guide support and all items designed to help me live as independently as I can," Stephen told the *Eye*.

Until 1996 people like Stephen would have received awards in line with payments made to victims in the civil courts. But rising costs forced the government to introduce its "tariff" scheme. Given the way it is operated and the low cap, the gap between the two systems is now scandalous. As the government shows no sign of changing the system, Stephen is taking his case to appeal. But he isn't holding his breath.

DANNY MORRISON

Anti-social security services

IN A MOVE that could gravely embarrass the British security services, the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) has referred the curious 18-year-old case of Sinn Fein's former head of publicity, Danny Morrison, back to the appeal court.

Morrison, once Gerry Adams' right hand man, was convicted and sentenced to eight years in jail for imprisoning a republican informer, Sandy Lynch. Morrison always claimed that he was set up by British intelligence and had been called to the house where Lynch was being held in order to take him to a press conference to "parade" him.

The CCRC isn't saying if Morrison is right. Indeed, after a three-year investigation, it is keeping secret the new evidence it has uncovered, as well as its reasons for sending Morrison's case, and that of co-accused former IRA hunger striker Gerard Hodgins, back to the appeal court for a second time. Officials won't even tell the two men's lawyers why the matter is being referred – secrecy the lawyers will challenge.

The referral certainly centres on Freddie Scappaticci, the former head of IRA internal security who was named in 2003 as an army double agent called Stakeknife – a role he denies. At Morrison's trial, Scappaticci was named as the IRA man who terrorised and obtained Lynch's confession in a West Belfast home in January 1990. He had left the scene before Morrison arrived – closely followed by the army and RUC who promptly arrested him.

Morrison's solicitor Barra McGrory said that if it were true Scappaticci was working for army intelligence, it totally undermined the prosecution case that Lynch had ever been falsely imprisoned. As Lynch too was a police informer, it's possible he could also have been party to a set-up.

"The fact that the reasons for a referral are being kept secret suggests that there might be some truth in it," said Mr McGrory, who will ask the Northern Ireland court of appeal to order disclosure of the new evidence so Danny Morrison's appeal can be properly argued.

However, the crown may well opt not to contest the appeal so no dirty secrets about the British security services have to be revealed in court. Watch this space...

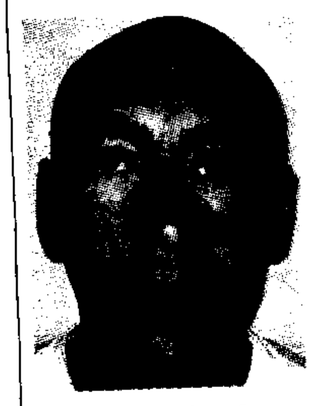
FAMILY MOSAIC

Live and let die

WHEN petty crook Thomas Hughes, 41, was jailed for life last month for the "ruthless execution" of a young pregnant woman, Krystal Hart, on her own doorstep, the court heard that the underlying cause of the shooting was a long-running dispute between Hart and Hughes's girlfriend, Angie Brewer.

Brewer, 53, lived in the flat below Hart, 22, in Battersea, south London. She was described as a "neighbour from hell" who played loud music into the night and screamed abuse at anyone who dared stand up to her. Prosecuting barrister Aftab Jafferjee told the Old Bailey that Brewer had "a huge moral responsibility" for the murder.

Krystal Hart



Thomas Hughes

What nobody in court questioned was why the two women had been left living next door to each other for so long. Both were tenants of the Family Mosaic housing association, one of the largest housing groups in the UK, which provides homes and services to around 45,000 people across London and Essex.

Family Mosaic had received complaints about Brewer's extreme anti-social behaviour as long ago as 2004. A number of tenants and private home owners in the street had moved away to escape her. Yet the housing association had only recently begun any moves against her.

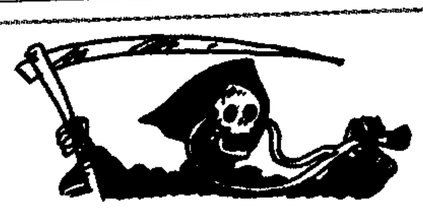
Brewer's dispute with Krystal Hart was so long-standing and bitter that both had installed CCTV cameras to monitor their flats. Shortly before the murder in 2007, Brewer and Hart had yet another argument, during which Brewer was overhead shouting: "I'm going to shoot you" to the younger woman. The threats had been reported to both the police and Family Mosaic, but still Brewer was allowed to remain in her flat.

Family Mosaic promised residents in June 2006 that eviction proceedings would start shortly. But then it decided to apply for an Asbo against Brewer instead. This was due to be heard in court in April 2007. Krystal was shot the week before the hearing was due to take place.

After the murder, Family Mosaic commissioned a confidential independent inquiry into how the association had handled the case. A statement to the *Eye* said: "The review found that our procedures and policies on anti-social behaviour were fundamentally sound, but that they should be reviewed in light of this case. We have done this and stepped up monitoring of anti-social behaviour and the way in which serious cases are escalated to senior management. We have also improved staff training on handling such cases, so that staff can share best practice in this area."

The *Eye* asked how it could be "fundamentally sound" that Angie Brewer, who now lives elsewhere, had been allowed to make her neighbours' lives hell for so many years, culminating in the murder of another tenant. John Gibbons, corporate services director, said it was not possible to comment on the case: "One of our fundamental repsonsibilities is to our tenants including protecting the information concerning them."

Doubtless very reassuring for any other Family Mosaic tenants who find themselves next to a neighbour from hell.



NHS PLC

1. The heebie-GPs

THE government seems determined to ignore what patients want – and the courts – in its drive to privatise family doctor services.

Patients are set to launch a second high court challenge to the decision to hand over GPs surgeries to United Health Europe, the British arm of America's biggest healthcare corporation, this time in north London.

Camden primary care trust (PCT) upset both residents and doctors after it emerged that it had given United the contract to run three doctors' practices in the borough, even though the firm had scored lower than the local GPs' bids on clinical matters. Clearly United scored highly for promising to reduce costs, but that has fuelled fears that patient care might decline.

In what she hopes will be a re-run of the successful court challenge to United in Derbyshire (see *Eye* 1166), Camden resident Barbara Saunders (pictured) is seeking a judicial review of the health corporation's contract in Camden on the grounds of inadequate consultation by the PCT.

In August 2006 the court of appeal quashed the selection of United to run practices in Derbyshire, and ordered North Eastern Derbyshire PCT to re-tender. It also awarded costs to Pam Smith, the patient pensioner who had bought the judicial review.

The case established that patients have a legal right to be involved and consulted on plans for changes. Unfortunately for the Derbyshire GPs, they lost out again in the new round of tendering to Chilvers McCrae Healthcare, the private company running the largest number of GP surgeries in the country.

None of this augurs well for Camden's doctors, especially now so many big businesses, including the likes of Richard Branson's Virgin and the big supermarkets, are getting their snouts in the NHS primary care trough. So much for a "patient-led" NHS.

2. The CONsultants

AFTER a year of payroll chaos, courtesy of the *Eye's* favourite outsourcing company, Capita, hospital staff in Leicester thought things couldn't get any worse. Then their personal bank details were found lying in the street.

When the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust farmed out its payroll department last April, bosses said Crapita had been chosen because of its, ahem, "good track record" (*Eye* 1189). Month after month there were problems with around 4,000 staff being underpaid, not paid for overtime or even not paid at all. The hospital itself ended up paying bank charges for staff who went overdrawn because they hadn't received their salaries.

Personal details of 200 staff, including addresses and bank account details, were then found in a street in Stevenage last month. One Crapita employee has been suspended and security specialists have been brought in to investigate. Crapita says it does not believe any of the information fell into the wrong hands (other than its own, anyway).

3. Organised chaos

CONGRATULATIONS to the bright sparks who timetabled the free shuttle bus running between Huddersfield and Calderdale hospitals.

Nurses were already irked at being constantly rotated between the two sites (which are seven miles apart) as part of staff reorganisation. But at least there was a new, free bus for hospital workers and patients.

Alas, the bus service doesn't start until 7.30am, which would make nurses very late for their 7am morning shift. And for nurses finishing at 9pm after working the late shift, the last bus leaves Calderdale at 8.30pm. Brilliant!

4. Stuck in LIFT

THE latest big earner for the PFI industry in the increasingly privatised NHS is the "local improvement finance trust" (LIFT) programme for primary care, which is being pushed through with no evidence that it works.

The scheme involves bringing several GPs on to one site owned mainly by PFI companies even though, less than two years ago the public accounts committee (PAC) found that "providing new, purpose built primary care premises is more expensive than continuing with the existing estate". It also found that "new methods of care leading to centralisation of services can result in access problems for patients".

However, because LIFT promises another PFI bonanza, it got a big thumbs-up in the recent Treasury report on public investment. Just the 44 schemes signed so far will cost £5.5bn from primary care budgets, Tory MP Mike Penning discovered. Dozens more deals are in the pipeline.

But what's the attraction of LIFT for health services? Minister Ben Bradshaw revealed all at the "LIFT awards 2008" (sponsored by PFI consultant PwC among, others): "When Professor Lord Ari Darzi's report is finally published in the summer it is entirely possible that one outcome of his findings will be the provision of more, modern, purpose-built primary care facilities. LIFT is in an excellent position to deliver this." So LIFT perfectly suits the PFI consultants and bankers and private companies like Virgin who will run Darzi's "polyclinics". And the patients? What do they have to do with it?

PS:

NHS bosses in Birmingham need a new name for their £700m hospital "transformation", originally called "Transform 2010".

With planning permission for a new hospital still not granted and the land not yet bought, the full project isn't expected to be finished until 2014 at the earliest. "We are looking at another label instead of 2010," admitted Rob Bacon, chief executive of Sandwell primary care trust.

In the City

THE impression created by the decision to promote the worthy but anonymous Richard Alderman – a legend in nobody's lunchtime – to the high-profile job of running the Serious Farce Office was that the former head of Revenue and Customs civil investigations was the proverbial "safe pair of hands" so beloved by ministers and mandarins.

But the luckless Alderman has arrived just in time to receive the biggest and most potentially pain-filled hospital pass of all time: dealing with the anticipated court-dictated order to reconsider the decision to shut down the BAE Systems/Al Yamamah corruption investigation in the face of Saudi threats.

Robert Wardle, the outgoing SFO director who took that decision under pressure from Tony Blair and his legal lapdog Lord Goldsmith, themselves reacting to threats from Prince Bandar, the £1bn alleged beneficiary of BAE generosity with the Saudi people's money, is due to leave next week – when Lord Justice Moses and Mr Justice Sullivan are expected to announce what the SFO should now do, having ruled that its original decision in December 2006 was unlawful. Bandar, of course, denies any wrongdoing whatsoever.

Wardle indicated that he had no wish to delay his departure. So it is Alderman, who has been in the SFO finding out what the SFO director does since 1 April, who will have to decide what to do about the body's biggest challenge since the debacles of the early 1990s that earned its nickname.

It was known that the BAE Systems ruling was due about the time of the changeover. Furthermore, it was no surprise that the SFO and the government received a legal kicking over a shabby decision, which the judges rightly declared invited "dismay if not outrage". Moses had made clear his distaste for the craven surrender to Saudi threats during the hearing, so the SFO may well have been preparing for the likelihood of BAE finding its way on to Alderman's desk soon after day one.

Even so, this will represent a big test for Alderman. So what are the options – assuming matters are not delayed by a government/SFO appeal against the ruling? As a man long skilled in Whitehall thinking, Alderman will no doubt be alert to suggestions that an appeal is the way to go. It could buy a lot of time. It is clear that Gordon Brown also does not want a prosecution.

Wardle maintained that he had only ever been influenced by the Saudi threats to withdraw co-operation on anti-terrorism intelligence – itself seen by many experts as an empty threat – and not by the also threatened loss of the £20bn Typhoon contract to BAE, which was what clearly motivated Blair. But there is no doubt that he disagreed with his political boss Goldsmith that the Saudi case was going nowhere and thus was upsetting the Saudis for nothing – a view Goldsmith still holds, saying the investigation is "doomed to failure". This may in part reflect the fact that most, if not all, the payments to Bandar and other Saudis took place before they could have been illegal under British law. Also, there is the issue of whether the corrupt payments were legal because the Saudis approved them.

Wardle's view was still that it was impossible to decide whether there could be a case until the secrets of the Swiss bank accounts used by the two chief Saudi bagmen were revealed. It was precisely this possibly imminent threat that prompted Bandar to pressurise Blair's chief of staff Jonathan Powell and the Foreign Office in the months before the decision to halt the investigation. Certainly Bandar would not relish evidence being published about how he and his family were ripping off their own people by demanding huge kickbacks from BAE.

It would, therefore, be open to Alderman to resume that drive to obtain access to the Swiss accounts. The Swiss authorities themselves have already launched their own inquiry and they are far happier to share this information these days than they used to be. The account holders could well resist and there could be legal battles, which could take time but would still show that the SFO and Britain were after all serious about finding the truth and prosecuting corruption. Whether it would succeed would remain to be seen.

As has been shown already, Bandar is not without influence. He is the son of the Saudi crown prince and former defence minister Prince Sultan, whose fingerprints were all over the original Al-Yamamah contract with BAE in the 1980s. Sultan could be the next ruler of Saudi Arabia, and there are those who suggest Bandar is working to ensure that happens. As a former ambassador to the US, Bandar is also very close to President Bush and is considered in the US to have protection from the White House until George W departs next January.

Which brings us to the US probe into the Bandar payments by BAE. The British government has so far refused to assist that inquiry by handing over the evidence the Americans have requested. This is probably unprecedented. The belief is that the government hoped that by doing so it would prevent the US from bringing a successful prosecution of BAE, which would have caused great embarrassment after the SFO surrender. However, the Justice Department has already obtained a great deal of information about how BAE looked after Bandar and other Saudis from the SFO's original informant – the British facilitator of the Saudi hospitality service.

For some time now there have been suggestions in Washington that the Justice Department would cut a plea bargain deal with BAE, who would pay a large fine while not admitting any wrongdoing. That way both sides would avoid the risks and costs of a prosecution. While the department has brought a large number of prosecutions under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) in recent years – payments to Bandar as a high-ranking Saudi official would fit the FCPA frame – it has also often looked to make so-called "deferred prosecution agreements".

Under such a deal, the company agrees to pay a fine and enters into a monitoring agreement with the Justice Department designed to impose internal reforms and prevent the former bad behaviour. The monitor is an outside appointee. The company acknowledges that it broke the law but does not admit guilt. If it behaves itself for the following one to three years, the potential charges are dismissed.

Deferred prosecution agreements have been very popular since the Enron collapse and the destruction of auditor Arthur Andersen. Accountants KPMG did such a deal in 2005 to prevent being prosecuted for facilitating tax fraud while also paying $456m. Last year American Express Bank International paid $65m to settle a case over lax regulations that allowed drug money laundering.

A deferred prosecution arrangement, accompanied by a hefty fine, could be attractive to BAE as it would avoid the risk of being convicted and shut out of the US market while giving the Americans a big scalp and not further embarrassing Bandar and the Saudis – something President Bush would no doubt support as a long-time family friend of Bandar and the rest of the ruling elite.

By law it is the SFO director's decision alone whether to prosecute a case; the courts can ask him to review the decision but cannot dictate the outcome. So it is open to Alderman if required to review the previous decision and confirm it. Whether he could now do so on the same "evidence" of the impact of the Saudi threats may be questionable. It may be necessary to do what Wardle wanted to do, namely to see what Switzerland produces or to agree with Goldsmith that any case would fail for legal reasons – ie that it was not illegal under then British law or that the payments were approved.

What is certain is that the British government still does not want to upset the Saudis and does not want to lose the Typhoon contract and jobs, so perhaps the best outcome would be to allow the Americans to cut a deal with BAE. It could then be said that the Saudi matter had been sorted. However, BAE would only be likely to do such a deal on the basis that arrangements were also reached to end the investigations in Britain and Switzerland. BAE could even plead guilty to some technical offences – as had been suggested as a way out of the problem in the early days. That option was killed off by Blair, who did not want the Saudis upset in any way, although that may now not be possible to avoid. But if Bandar's name is not going to be dragged through a lengthy court case, he could be persuaded that this was the best offer available in the circumstances.

While that is all playing out, the SFO can seek to show that it is really tough on corruption by bringing one of the other BAE cases – such as Tanzania, where, unlike that other African target South Africa, nobody cares if local corrupt politicians or parties are upset.

THE word is that Italian prosecutors are stepping up their investigation of lawyer David Mills, aka Mr. Tessa Jowell, the Olympics Minister, over the favours he did for former and possibly future Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi. The Italians are expected back in London soon for a further round of interviews.

This time the focus could be the mysterious disappearance of documents related to Berlusconi's offshore companies that travelled to London from Switzerland and then headed for Malta, from where they either vanished or found their way back to Switzerland. The fate of the documents has long been of interest to Italian investigators, who believe they were removed from Switzerland to avoid becoming available for their inquiries.

THE DIRECTORS

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WHAT? IT'S PEOPLE I'M TALKING ABOUT Y'FOOL!

NUMBER CRUNCHING

5,000 Jobs lost in manufacturing in three months last year, which CBI described as "very welcome revival"

10,000 Jobs predicted to be lost in financial sector in next three months, which CBI describes as "very serious crisis"

BBC BUSINESS editor Robert Peston's examination of those responsible for the current economic crisis, *Super Rich: the Greed Game*, shown on BBC2 on 1 April, featured a very smug Steve Schwarzman.

"It's going to be a great opportunity – the real golden age comes when you have a mess. It will be a great time for buying businesses," declared the chief executive of private equity stars Blackstone. Peston was too well mannered to point out that among the leading beneficiaries of the greed game were one Schwarzman and his partner Peter Peterson. Schwarzman pocketed $677m from the Blackstone public offering last summer before the sub-prime bomb went off. Peterson received a staggering $1.88bn. Blackstone shares have since almost halved – from $31 to around $18.

SOMEWHAT slimmed billionaire Joe Lewis is no doubt grateful that J.P. Morgan Chase decided to up its rescue bid for Bear Stearns from $2 to $10 a share to ensure success. But it has still made only a small dent in the billion-dollar loss Lewis has suffered.

He continued to buy Bear Stearns shares right up until it had to be rescued. He bought 569,000 shares at $55 each – a total of $31m – the day before the bank sought help from the US Federal Reserve Bank on 14 March. He had previously added another 468,000 shares in two deals during February at prices of $79 and $86. This took his total investment at the time of the rescue to $1,260,913,899 for 12,136,724 shares now worth just $121m - making the Lewis loss $1.14bn.

While the last three share deals were described as open-market purchases, a big chunk of Lewis's losses were, it appears, caused by his taking "put" option money from those who believed Bear Stearns shares were going south and wanted an option to sell. Lewis was forced to take up more than 2.5m shares from those to whom he had sold put options. As an *Eye* reader points out, this is often a tactic designed to reduce the overall purchase price, but when it goes wrong there is no escape. Having taken the money, Lewis had to take the shares. Most of these "puts" were at prices from $120 to $90.

Just how Lewis is going to repay the banks that loaned him the money to make the Bear Stearns play remains to be seen.

PLANET FOOTBALL
West Ham

FANS of the Hammers will be hoping the storms blasting Iceland's economy and its banks do not bode ill for the future financing from billionaire owner Bjorgolfur Gudmundsson, who paid £85m for the club in 2006.

At the time Iceland was riding high, with bankers like Gudmundsson (he and his son are the largest shareholders in Landsbanki, one of the three biggest local banks, whose shares have fallen substantially) fuelling a worldwide acquisition splurge reminiscent of that conducted by the Japanese in the 1980s. But now there are growing concerns about the Icelandic economy, the interlocking fortunes of its bankers and entrepreneurs and the extent to which they can withstand a fall in asset values.

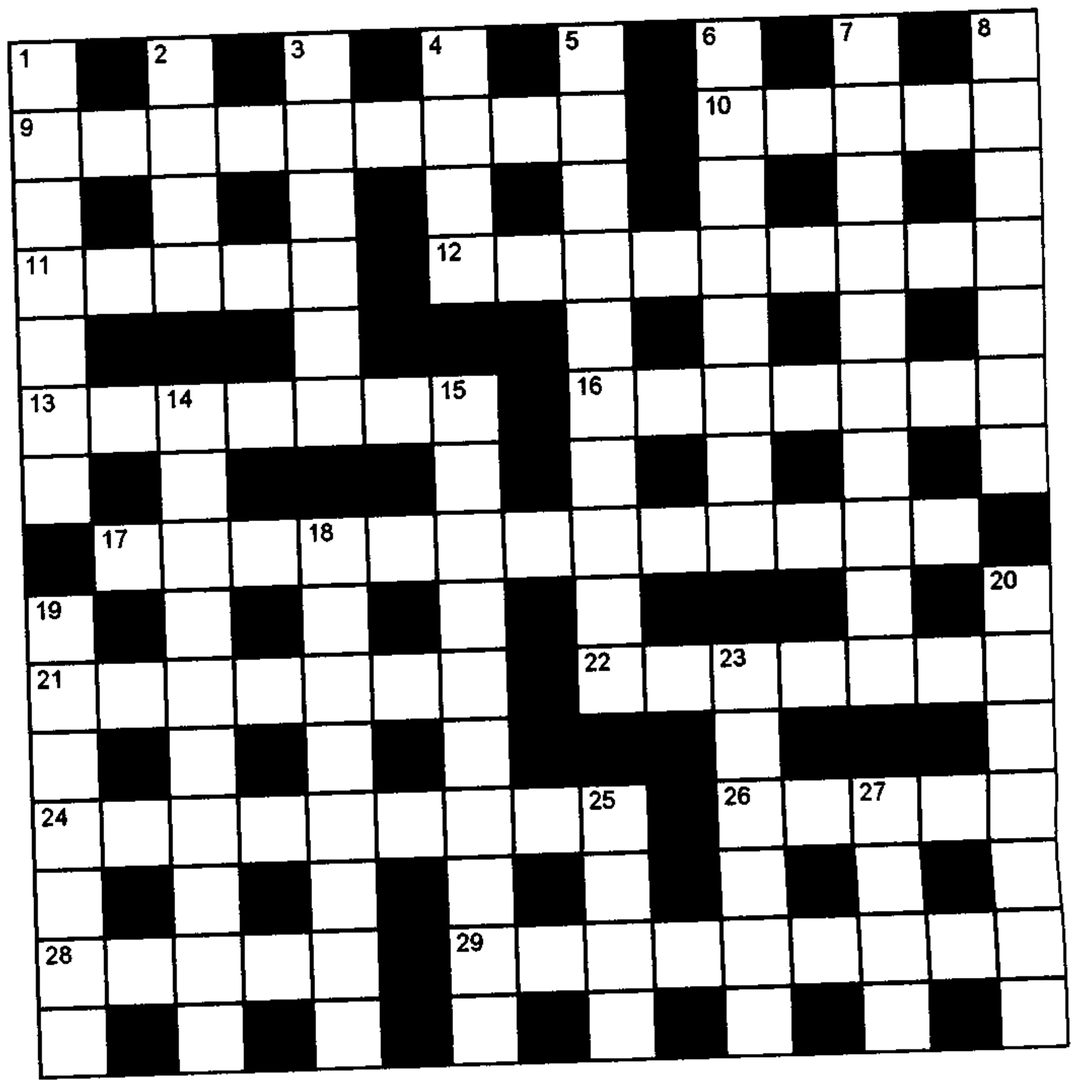
Credit agencies have been revising downwards the status of Iceland and its banks, although many experts believe these fears are exaggerated and the economy and banks are sound. But it may mean there will be less money for players to fund an improvement in West Ham's fortunes next season.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 363
by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 25 April 2008

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

9 Nit screwed up, entering ground zero attack (5,4)
10 Offensive from Conservative blue (5)
11 "X" part of the Dirty Digger's empire (5)
12 Creep getting, pervertedly, leg over left and right (9)
13 Local dish excited over massive grope? "Not I" (3,4)
16 Cambridge lot bound to accept tip from Hillary? (3,4)
17 What some politicians are coy to reveal in full – like the queen (a bad sign) having amusing day? (8,5)
21 Evidence of awful BSE climax (7)
22 Shit lover once on holiday island (7)
24 Ranted about Brown getting in: "Not working" (9)
26 Middle of *Sun* has taboo word: name moved two the left, so not censored (5)
28 Slight, sad life, Gordon, ultimately (5)
29 Point by Jack, spinning actual "end of sleaze"? Come! (9)

DOWN

1 Clumsy ape squeezing mine hard – something to remember me by? (7)
2 The ones vulgarly after sex product (4)
3 In short, Brian and Brenda's supplementary tipple (6)
4 Has no goolies (neck's present) (4)
5 Bollocks lacking? Sensible (2,8)
6 Piss off like an idiot attending Open University (5,3)
7 Balls placed over doctor's big instrument (4,6)
8 Maybe a baron's "bought it"? (7)
14 Sixties feminists' suggestion to their sisters, on catching Sun editor pissed? (7,3)
15 Good bloke, shagger, one producing a course? (10)
18 Expecting Labour to follow eventually (8)
19 In the sack, holding mad Tory, getting end away – climax not reached (7)
20 Ex-PM starts to eliminate 'negative' unbeliever (7)
23 "We want a bung from you", said to be an element of candidate selection in US (6)
25 See 27
27/25 VD? Put gin on balls (8)

Crossword 362 winner: PETER SCOTT-PRESLAND

ACROSS: 1 Eggcup 5 To be sure 9 Giving head 10 Ogle 11 Stigma 12 Horny 14 Dreamt-up 16 Primly 17 Uterus 19 Reflexes 21 Oddly 22 Allege 25 Soak 26 Epiglottis 27 White tie 28 Yo-ho-ho.

DOWN: 2 Glitterati 3 Cling 4 Pageant 5 Toe the party line 6 Bad trip 7 Storyline 8 Rule 13 Old English 15 Air pocket 18 Saddest 20 Frailty 23 Latch 24 Tosh.

YOBETTES
HUSBAND
Look at them...
... All they want to do is get you pissed and shag you
Sounds good to me. Large Gin and Tonic for me mate
BAR

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I've been sent to the front page
Are you sure this is a tank?
Bloody MOD cutbacks
CHINESE O
START E
PRIVATE EYE
QUEEN OPENS HEATHROW'S T5
And this is where we lose the bags, Ma'am...
...and this is where we cancel all the flights
How very interesting!

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Submissions will be accepted for material published in a newspaper, magazine or on a website between 1st September 2007 and 31st August 2008.

For full details and entry form visit
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THE CLOSING DATE FOR ENTRIES IS 1st September 2008

OM SAI RAM

A fitting end to the ill-fitting British suit

A suitable man to spark a men's clothing revolution

Consider this proposition. Would you rather pay the same sum for a single, off-the-peg, chain store suit cut by a computer and sold to you by a spotty boy who thinks side vents are to be found on a Lambretta scooter, or for two bespoke, custom cut, hand-stitched suits, measured and sold to you by a man for whom suits are a lifetime's passion?

The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani***, that – a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up – he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more: 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business. It's a mission.

'I love seeing customers walk in a really bad suit that cost them a fortune and walk out in one of our suits that's perfect in every way, made with a good heart in a superior fabric for a half or a quarter as much.'

The price of a Daswani shirt and suit are astonishing. We are talking from £19 (£25 including tax and duty) for a custom shirt and £129 (£169 including tax and duty) for a fully lined, made-to measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £250 (£325 including tax and duty) for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade button holes to knee lining. Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500 (£1,950 including tax and duty), costs a third less than it would on **Savile Row**.

Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It now remains to see whether the Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, will see the end of the off-the-peg British chain store suit. On price alone, it's a sartorial solution that will even please the Suits in accounts.

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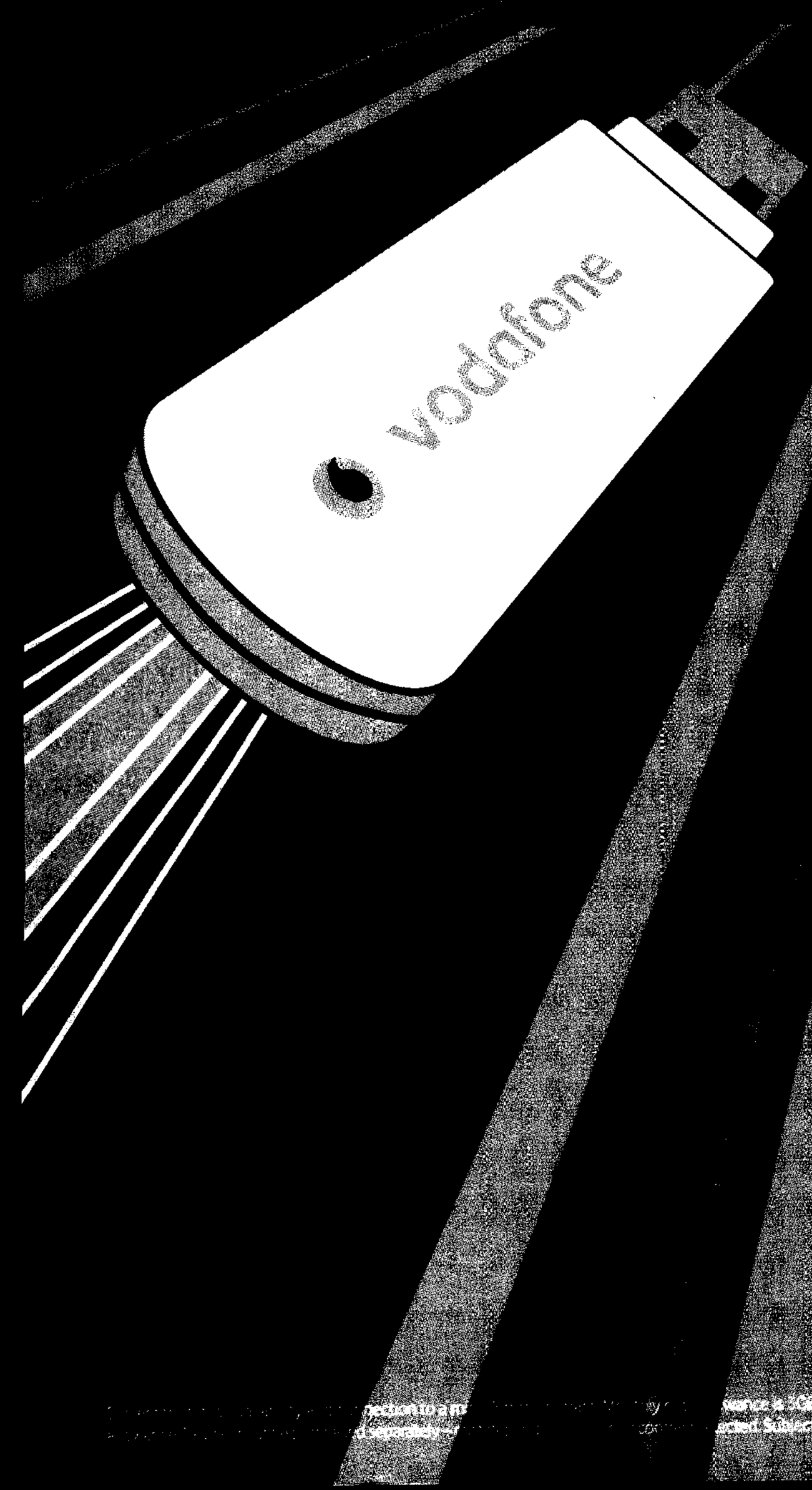

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MIDDLE-AGED PERSON: failed in long-term business; in need of substantial amount in order to keep up mortgage repayments and 4 grown-up kids in education. Your financial help will enable him to rebuild his business. Thanks in advance. S/C: 50-30-05. A/C: 24101494.

G.B. ATHLETE would love to take Mum to first Olympics(Beijing) as thanks for continuous support. S/C: 11-03-91. A/C: 01651835.

YOUNG WOMAN CAN'T PAY RENT / electricity. Desperate and scared. RBOS, S/C: 83-24-38. A/C: 00133219.

PLEASE HELP FIGHT my depression. Donations, Nationwide, S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 09089113. Help appreciated.

PRACTICAL, PROFESSIONAL, honest single male seeks live / work space, London Zone 1-2. Cheap rent in return for security, maintenance and considerable appreciation. No Agents or con artists. eyelive-work@live.co.uk

SEVERELY DISABLED GIRL, (24) needs £7000 to address international conference to right a wrong. Anything appreciated. Creatively.communicating@blueyonder.co.uk S/C: 20-58-51 A/C: 40607835.

LEFT PENNILESS by personal guarantee paid to bank. Donations welcome. S/C: 30-00-45. A/C: 82324186.

ANY FINANCIAL HELP PLEASE so I can send my very bright child to private school to fulfil her potential. S/C: 60-01-35. A/C: 52004813.

TERMINAL DISEASE. Not afraid but desperate. Children must smile. One last holiday. Grateful for all help. S/C: 40-11-24. A/C: 61100203.

PLEASE HELP AVOID COLLAPSE. Charming turned Rat left us with £18K debt. Thank you. S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 608120998.

CRIPPLING CREDIT CARD DEBTS: working full-time but still sinking, desperately need help please. S/C: 11-05-64. A/C: 00498379. Thanks.

STRUGGLING PARENT needs £20K after multiple bereavements. Please help get life started again. HBOS, S/C: 11-05-67. A/C: 00780732.

...MY PARENTS OUT ASAP! 350,000 euros donation to them secures you their luxury Costa del Sol apartment. More details? Contact David Palmer – davidtpalmer@tiscali.co.uk

£600 NEEDED TO FUND TENNIS. Son, aged 6 wants to go tennis. Thank you in advance. S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 40160794.

PHILANTHROPIST WANTED for band renowned for their exuberance / punctuality. Meagre returns expected. www.myspace.com/strangea

LONE PARENT advised by legal system following divorce to give up career and raise children on benefits. Appalled and seeking funds to keep home and job. S/C: 11-15-21. A/C: 00176777.

HELP ME CLEAR MY DEBTS. Any help appreciated. S/C: 40-05-16. A/C: 61630512.

ACTOR NEEDS HELP to retrain in construction and pay council tax bailiff. Thank you. Barclays, S/C: 20-81-21. A/C: 60668095.

HUSBAND IS DISABLED, depressed and off work. £50K hole in finances, please help S/C: 30-93-20. A/C: 00575392.

EYE-TOOTH LOST to untreated infection because no NHS dentist. Need £2300 for bone graft and implantation. S/C: 110355. A/C: 00013759.

COMPOSING BROADWAY MUSICAL, self-financing, costing more than expected. Producers on board; need funds to continue writing. Any help appreciated, interested investors contact broadwayorbankrupt@gmail.com HSBC, S/C: 40-14-13. A/C: 42267659.

OCD SUFFERER unable to go out to work or to obtain benefits; accumulated debts, very worried, any help appreciated. Therapist's letter available. barnes0508@yahoo.com. S/C: 20-27-48. A/C: 10199494.

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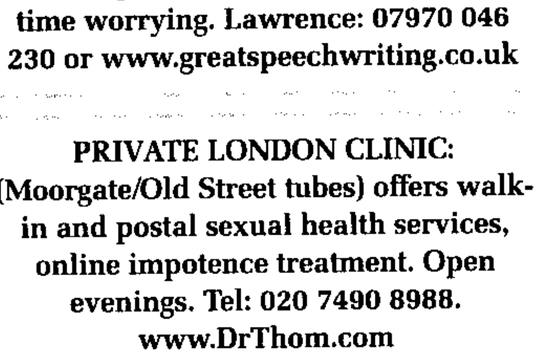

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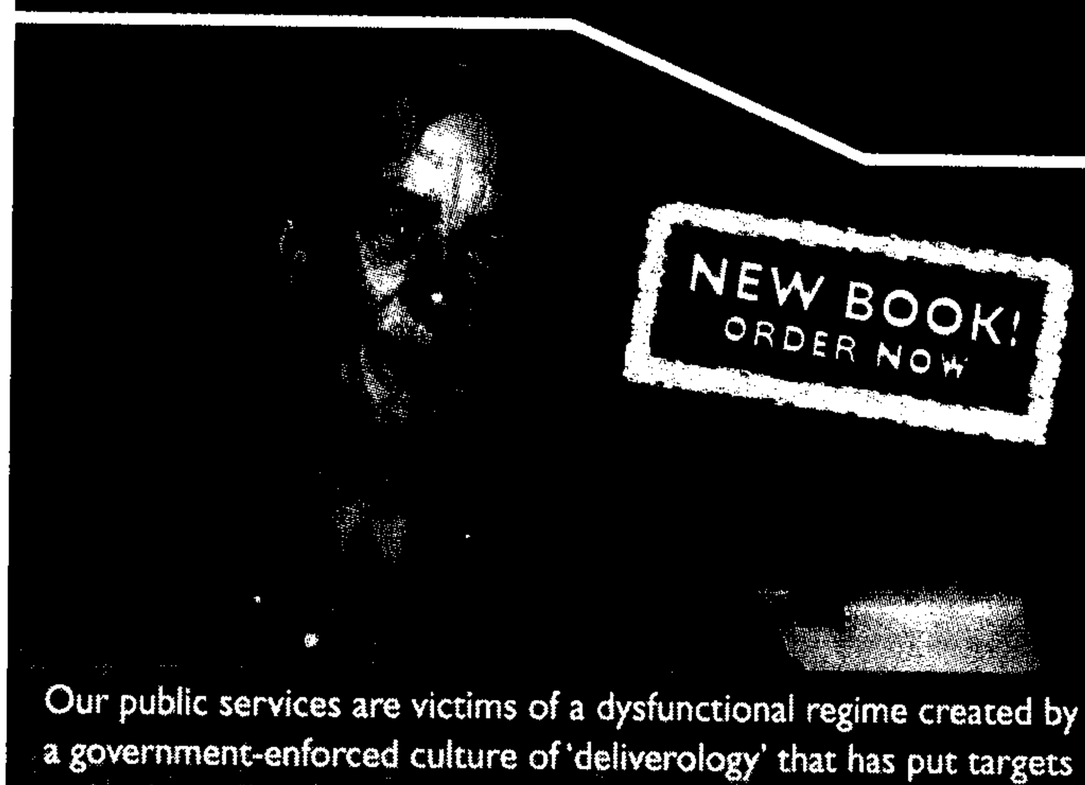

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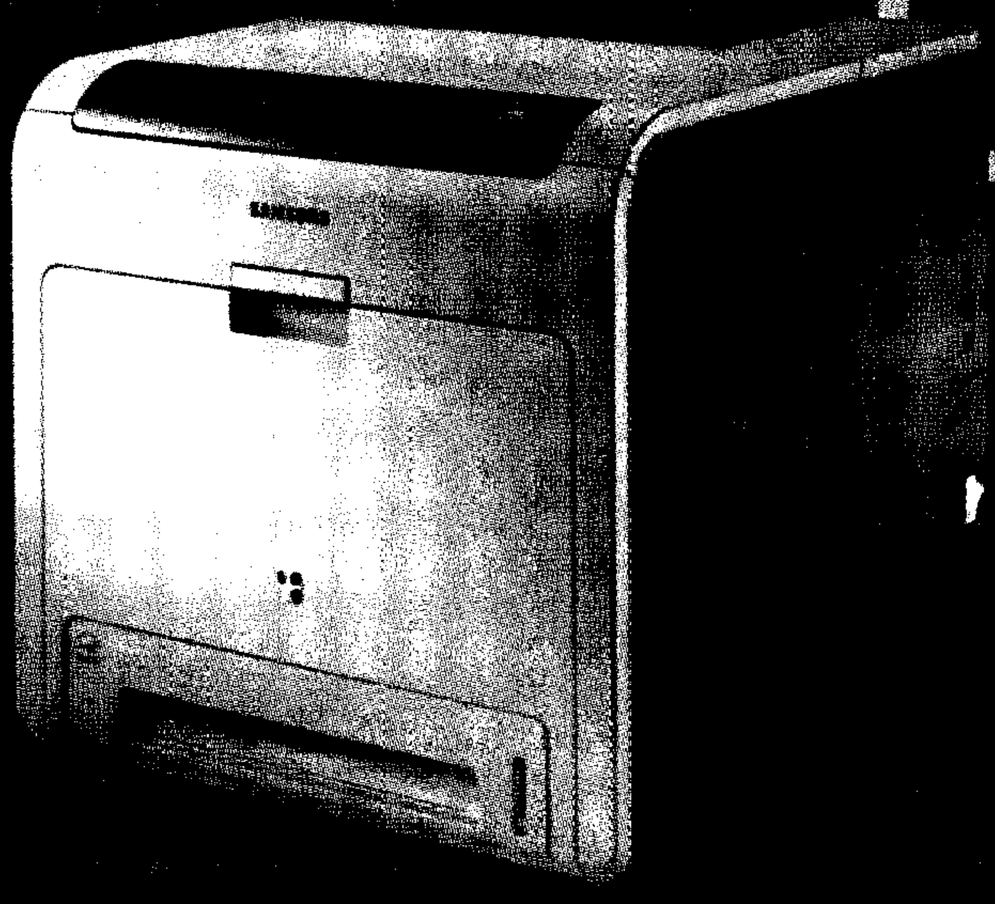

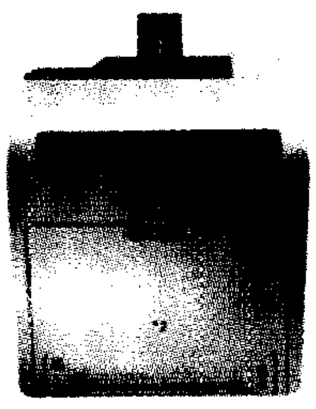

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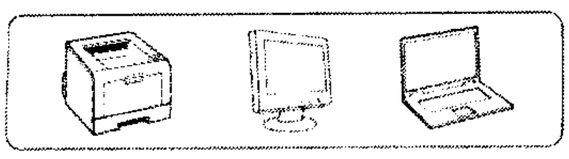

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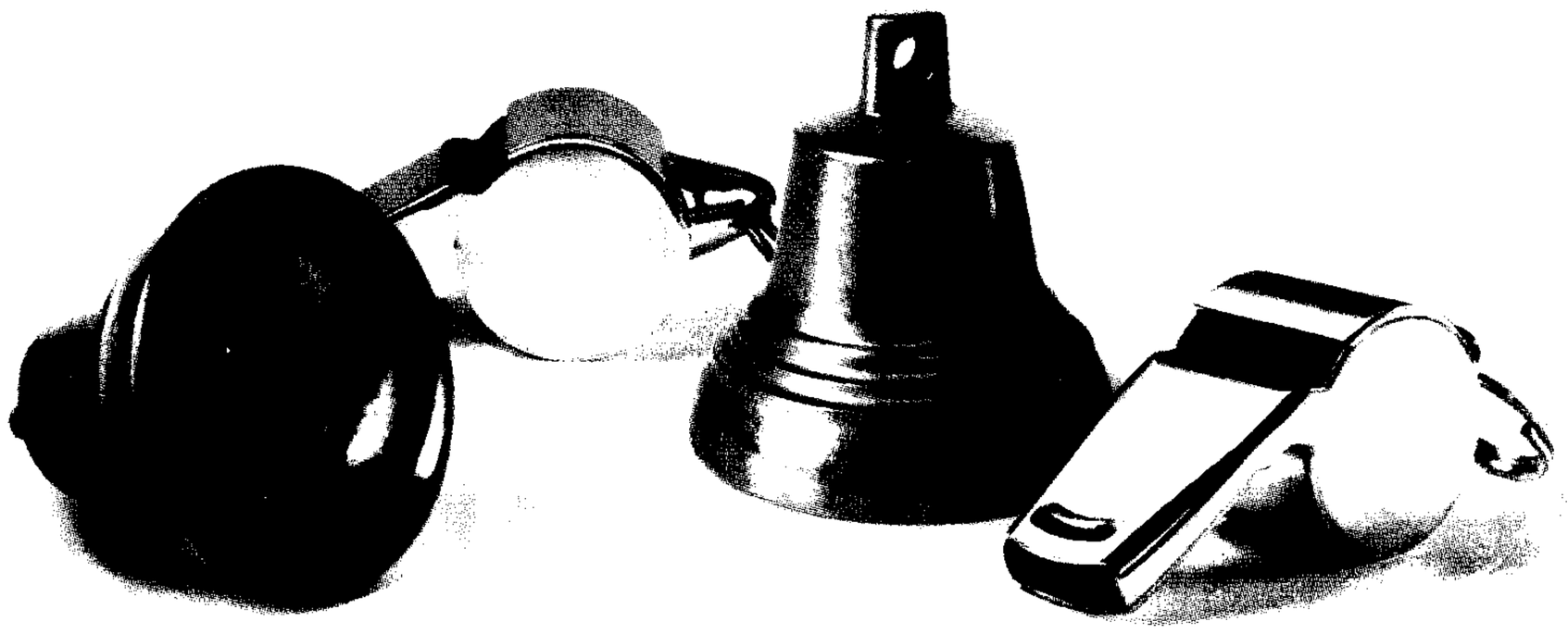

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